XBOX ONE VS PLAYSTATION 4: HOW THE CONSOLES COMPARE

gamesTM

www.gamestm.co.uk

Xbox One | PS4 | Wii U | PS3 | Xbox 360 | Wii | PC | iPad | PS Vita | 3DS | PSP | iPhone | DS | Arcade | Retro

"Microsoft just started a war."

XBOX ONE

ASSASSIN'S CREED IV
FORZA 5
THIEF
QUANTUM BREAK
WATCH DOGS

THE WITCHER 3: WILD HUNT
NEED FOR SPEED RIVALS
FIFA 14
UFC
BATTLEFIELD 4

- MICROSOFT'S PLAN BEYOND VIDEOGAMES
- WHY APPLE, NOT SONY, IS THE ENEMY
- LAUNCH LINE-UP ANALYSED

NEXT-GEN WOLFENSTEIN

How Bethesda is reinventing the original FPS



CALL OF DUTY: GHOSTS

Infinity Ward on keeping the juggernaut relevant

Finally, we're ready to get started. Sony, Nintendo and now Microsoft have shown their hands, while E3 has allowed third-party publishers to make a declaration of intent about the next generation. There are those that think the traditional console experience is going away; this is a crucial time in proving their relevance.

The Xbox One is as much about services as it is about games – contentious among the hardcore, perhaps, but undeniably a forward-looking step by Microsoft, and as our massive look at Microsoft's next-gen strategy this month proves, games are equally high on the company's agenda.

Our early glimpse at *Call Of Duty*'s venture into next-gen with *Ghosts* explores the conundrum facing Activision in sustaining the series' success. Find out how the publisher is trying to keep the massive franchise relevant, just as its contemporaries double down on their efforts.

The changing console cycles typically expose the complacency that comes with success – it's rare for any one manufacturer to dominate for more than two generations, and I feel like that's a positive means of keeping the industry competitive. Nintendo won the previous generation in hardware numbers, yet Microsoft made enormous leaps with the Xbox brand, while Sony found itself with an unexpected uphill battle; you can see that situation reflected in various ways through the strategies behind the Wii U, Xbox One and the PS4.

They've all got something to prove – and they're playing in a very different landscape to the one they entered in the mid-Noughties. I can't wait to see what the current market brings out of them.

Samuel Roberts
EDITOR




OH! MY CAR



Contents

www.gamestm.co.uk 136 | 13

PREVIEWS



REVIEWS

CALL OF DUTY: GHOSTS

Step inside Infinity Ward's next-gen vision for COD





> Have your say on anything videogame related at **www.gamestm.co.uk/forum** and you could feature in **games™**

 facebook.com/gamesTM @gamesTMmag  gplus.to/gamesTMmagazine

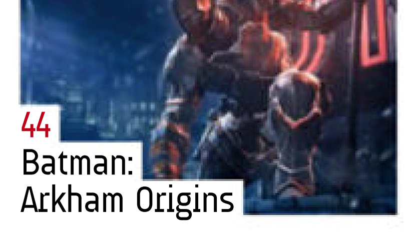
DISCUSS



20 Quantum Break

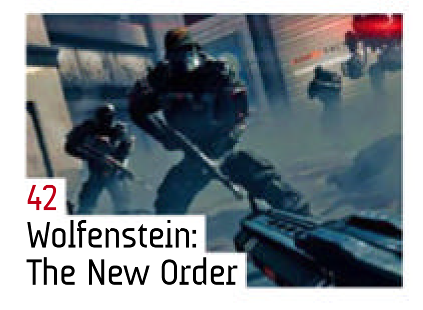
FEATURES





44 Batman: Arkham Origins

RETRO



42 Wolfenstein: The New Order

FAVOURITES

Turn to page 90

XBOX ONE

Microsoft's War Beyond Consoles

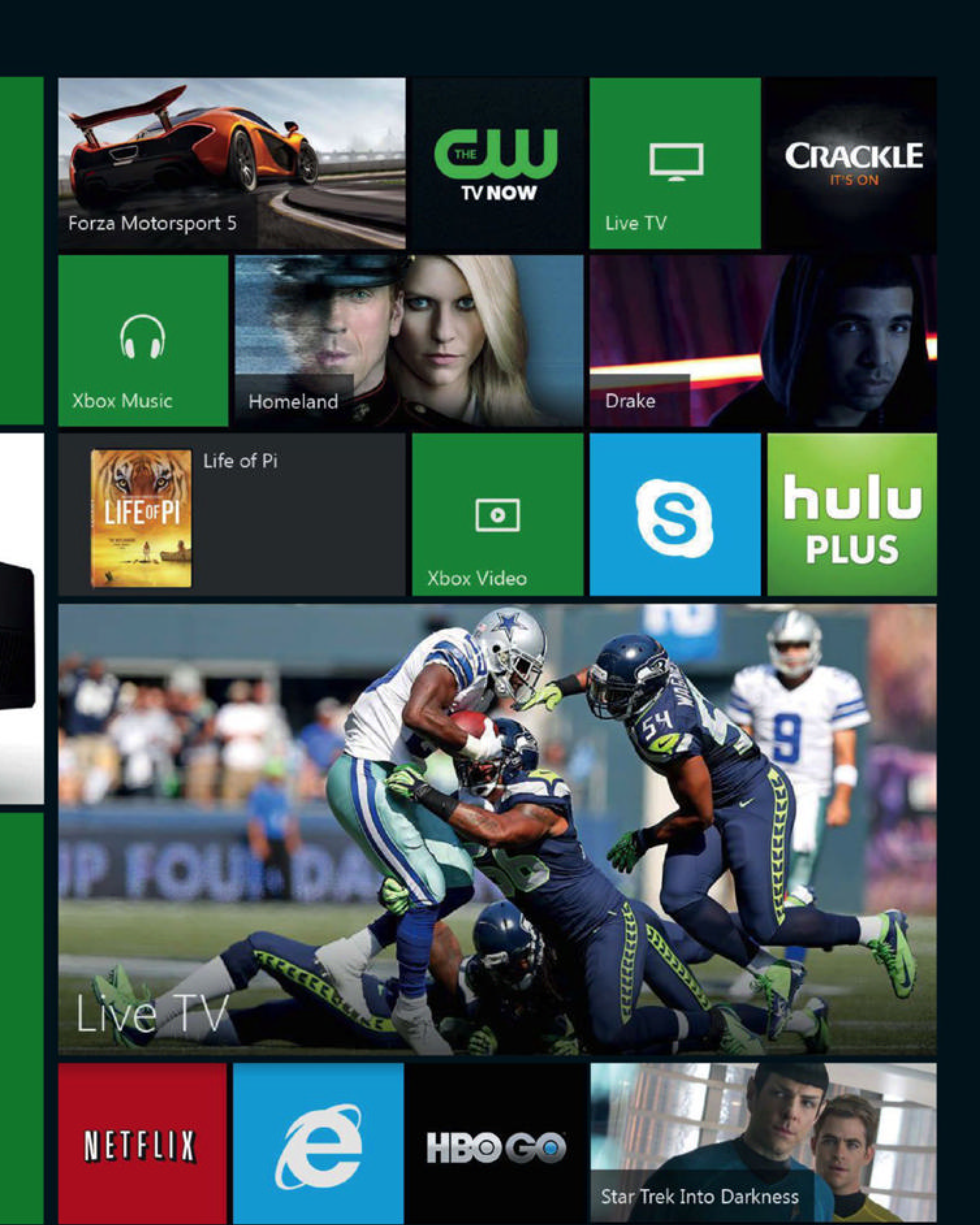
Microsoft has declared a war on all fronts – not simply content with competing with the PlayStation 4, Xbox One's focus on entertainment services is a risky pre-emption of where TV will be in five years' time. While games clearly still matter to Microsoft, here's why it's more important for the Silicon Valley giant to look beyond the core audience than either Sony or Nintendo…



No disrespect to his impressive body of film and TV work to date, but JJ Abrams hasn't made a videogame in his life. To kick off the Xbox One's reveal on 21 May 2013 with fleeting appearances from various big entertainment names, including Abrams, alongside the more familiar figures working in the industry today was a subtle way to deliver the mandate of Microsoft's new console: that TV, film and sport are as crucial to Xbox's future as interactive entertainment. Yes, games are still a massive part of what Xbox One is about (15 exclusives in the first year is a good number), but there's a bigger threat that Microsoft is conscious of, in the form of Apple, Google and other companies brandishing more contemporary ways to occupy our leisure time. Xbox One's initial reveal was met with negativity from some circles of gamers, but it offers a fascinating litmus test for the early prospects of next-gen hardware.

There's a big question mark over whether spending big on areas outside of games in an all-fronts entertainment war is too ambitious, even for a company of Microsoft's influence. A one billion investment in exclusive titles is an impressive statistic, yet Xbox One is fighting for your spare time, not just your money – Microsoft wants the monopoly on the non-gaming time you may invest in other devices. For better or worse, Microsoft's reveal showed that the company is using its deep pockets to make a huge gamble on entertainment services, alongside both new IP and returning series, broadening the user's relationship with Xbox beyond videogames.

Naturally, it didn't go down terribly well with traditional gaming audiences if social media and comment threads are any indication, with the name seeming like an odd choice, too, thanks to its connotations with the original Xbox. A Wii U-style branding problem seems unlikely, however – the main issue seemed to be with


Forza Motorsport 5
THE CW
TV NOW
Live TV
CRACKLE
IT'S ON
Xbox Music
Homeland
Drake
Life of Pi
LIFE OF PI
Xbox Video
hulu
PLUS
Live TV
NETFLIX
HBO GO
Star Trek Into Darkness

Microsoft's lack of focus on actual new games. Sony's triumph in announcing the PS4 was understanding that anyone going out of their way to livestream a console reveal is likely to only care about videogames, as opposed to NFL fans or casual players who just happen to have it open in their web browsers. Perhaps Microsoft should've switched its E3 and Xbox Reveal events around, focusing on the initial batch of exclusive titles in the way that Sony did straight off the bat, in order to get that crucial positive early response, but either way, it'll be interesting to see how that first reveal is remembered in the years to come.

Call Of Duty: Ghosts, *Forza Motorsport 5*, *Quantum Break* and EA Sports were all there to speak to every audience; *Quantum Break* was pretty much the main concession to hardcore players, as a Remedy-created new IP, though the presentation was far too vague to really stir too much of a response. Television and sport were positioned as equally important parts of the Xbox One's strategy, and announcing a crucial NFL content deal and unveiling the first on Xbox's TV push – a Steven Spielberg-produced *Halo* series – were clearly as important to Microsoft as the games were themselves.

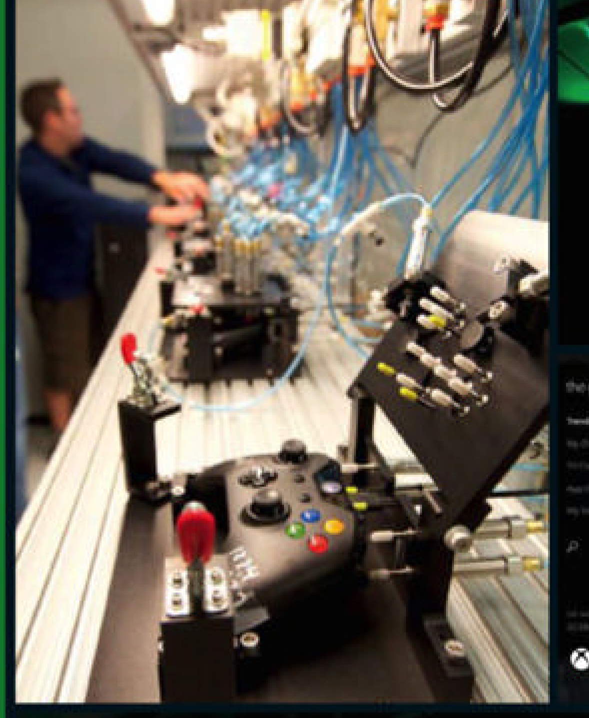
But how big a deal is a *Halo* TV series? While Spielberg has been involved with some superb television projects, such as *Band Of Brothers*, the presence of his name isn't a guarantee of an Emmy-worthy TV show. We explore this further later in this feature, but the fact is, if you're not going to make a *Halo* series that guns for *Game Of Thrones* rather than *Terra Nova* in quality, then the endeavour might not be worth it. We've seen *Forward Unto Dawn*, and we weren't that impressed by it, even in the face of its great production values. Quality control will be vital, here, then. Credibility should be Microsoft's number one priority, and it'll take more than big names to secure that on these many fronts.

Original TV content makes more sense when you look at the way the television world is changing, however. Look at Netflix – up until recently, the online streaming giant was a conduit to the content of minor and major film/TV studios. Then, it sunk enormous cash investments into original series like *House Of Cards* and *Hemlock Grove*, as a way to outline its worth in a competitive landscape of streaming outlets; US networks Starz and AMC are much the same, previously licensing movies to air before making enormous business out of creating original series. Microsoft is using its Xbox platform to do the same thing.

You can see why services and original content mean so much to Microsoft in the way games have changed, too. Observe the death of third-party single format exclusives we saw at the start of the last generation – PS3 and Xbox 360 became so closely matched in offering multi-format versions of games that the decision between which console to buy came down to whether you preferred *Halo*



Forza 5 was a safe way to kick off the Xbox One's software line-up.





Television matters to Microsoft, not just content-wise, but in fitting your lifestyle, too.



We imagine a lot of people will buy an Xbox One just to watch *A Good Day To Die Hard* on it.

It's an attractive set up, bringing a uniformity to the three components of Xbox.

or *Uncharted*, or alternatively, whatever community options fit your lifestyle. The age of third-party console exclusives without financial backing is gone, and DLC exclusivity deals seem about as good as it gets for Microsoft and Sony now; take that away, and services matter more than ever.

Microsoft now faces the same battle it had with Sony during the last generation, but on an exponentially larger scale. Some major American sports can be streamed straight to tablets without the need of a middleman distributor, now, and most TV shows find their way onto iTunes within 24 hours of airing (though it isn't quite as good in the UK). You can download video-on-demand on basically any device, with the only determining factor coming down to the hardware that suits you. We're living in the convergence device age – Microsoft's approach almost seems like it's pre-empting Apple's next steps into the living room with Apple TV, rather than seeing off Sony. So different are the two electronics giants' approach, you'd think they were fighting completely separate wars.

Microsoft is spending $400 million on the NFL deal alone, and as mentioned, Phil Harrison has pledged that $1 billion is being spent on Xbox One titles. With all the localised deals factored in, we'd expect spending on games and entertainment to be comparable on Xbox – those kind of numbers make it obvious what a hot button it is to Microsoft. The fight for Microsoft is for Xbox One to be input one on your television, your go-to entertainment platform no matter what, which is something that pay TV providers are also very mindful of as the medium has begun evolving into its next iteration.

The fear over content control is a concern for players, however. Microsoft's VP Phil Harrison mentioned that you'll be required to log into Xbox Live every 24 hours to keep your console's full functionality, while patents over Kinect's ability to detect who's in the room consuming content got a frosty reception. At the time of writing, none of this is at all final, but Phil Harrison did mention the possibility of daily log-ins himself in an interview with Kotaku. Sure, there's an argument that we already live in an always-online age, but perhaps it should be noted that there's a huge range of players out there who have consoles just for the simplicity of plugging in and playing. Xbox One needs to account for a reality where you're without broadband for months due to contemptuous ISPs casually missing reconnection appointments.

> "Microsoft's unveiling of the Xbox One was a declaration of intent to be the only box needed under your television"

It's a fallacy to think we're in a world where internet access is like tap water. A console that requires an internet connection would be a depressing by-product of the modern age. Like we say, none of this is definite, and Harrison's only crystal clear comment on the matter came when talking to Eurogamer: "I think the key point is to make is that Xbox One requires an internet connection, but it does not need to be connected all the time." At the very least, however, the prospect of such control hasn't garnered a great response, as DRM-related matters rarely do. Microsoft's attitude in such areas will be key to its early success against the PlayStation 4, since early adopters are likely to be more aware of such things.

In an age of convergence devices, then, Microsoft's unveiling of the Xbox One was a declaration of intent to be the only box needed under your television, as well as occupying the traditional role of a games console. While it's unlikely to be fondly remembered as the best of starts – not quite in the same way the PS3's debut left Sony to spend the next few years reversing perception of the console – Microsoft hasn't gone mad. It has both eyes on the future, on changing times and setting a mandate for the future of entertainment, yet the validity of that approach will be judged by hardcore gamers in the short run. Microsoft just started a war; there's a long way to go, but already it's plainly obvious that this generation will not pan out in the same fashion as the last. The platform holders have much more to consider, now, not simply contesting against one another but at the ever-expanding number of options available to the consumer. Xbox One and the PS4 have two very different responses to that conundrum, and that hunger to succeed will hopefully yield some positive results for gamers come the end of the year.

Optical Drive:	Blu-Ray/DVD
RAM:	8GB DDR3
CPU:	8 Core Microsoft custom CPU
Storage:	500 GB hard drive
Second Screen:	SmartGlass
Cloud Storage:	Yes
Mandatory Game Install:	Yes
DRM:	Yes
Backwards Compatibility:	No
USB:	USB 3.0
Web Connection:	Gigabit Ethernet, WiFi
BlueTooth:	Bluetooth 2.1 (EDR)
A/V Hookups:	HDMI input and output (4K support), Optical output

XBOX ONE

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE NEW MICROSOFT CONSOLE



With multimedia such an integral facet of the Xbox One mandate, the hardware supports 8GB of DDR3 RAM. It also incorporates ESRAM, which acts as a lightning-fast cache of embedded memory to compensate for the bandwidth deficit of the slower memory, compared to the PlayStation 4's GDDR5. Xbox One will also have 500 GB of hard drive storage.



The one connection that no other console currently possesses, the Xbox One's HDMI in supports 1080p, 3D and the latest trend, 4K – or at least the 30Hz version. It enables users to chain media devices so that the Xbox One can switch seamlessly between a game and television, while apps run simultaneously (such as Skype).



Perhaps the least surprising of the confirmed specs, as most had already gauged through leaked specs that the CPU would feature 8 AMD cores. What has yet to be confirmed is the clock-speed, which was purported to run at 1.6GHz.



After the HD-DVD/Blu-ray rivalry was ultimately won by the latter of the two, Xbox 360 has seemed down-at-heel as an all-encompassing entertainment machine in comparison to the PlayStation 3. Microsoft is set to right that wrong by adopting the Blu-ray drive for Xbox One, but has yet to confirm whether the new device will support the existing HD-DVD external drive available for Xbox 360. Fingers crossed.

GRAPHICS CORE

Confirming the leaked Durango spec that surfaced some months ago, the make-up of the Xbox One's GPU includes 12 compute units each capable of 64 ops/clock gives (which results in 768 total threads), which therefore gives a 1.2 teraflop graphics core. Like the PlayStation 4, the GPU is based on Radeon GCN architecture, but Sony's hardware boasts a 18 CU graphics core that has 50 per cent more raw power that the GPU in Xbox One.

COOLING SYSTEM

It appears that Microsoft has learned its lesson with the whirling blare of the Xbox 360 by integrating a huge cooler in the Xbox One, replete with copper heatpipes to transport heat to the sink before its blown out of the case by its sizeable fan. The larger the fan, the slower it spins within the casing ultimately making the machine run much quieter than its predecessor.

KINECT 2.0

BUT WILL WE WANT TO USE IT THIS TIME?



OBLIGATORY

One of the hard rules of Xbox One is that the new system will not function without Kinect 2.0 connected to the hardware. It's news that'll likely rub some of the demographic the wrong way given the hardcore have remained unconvinced by Kinect in its current form.



The improved Kinect camera captures RGB colour video at 30 frames per second, features a 1080p wide-angle depth camera and can now work completely in a darkened room. Microsoft suggests that alongside the enhanced field of view the actual detail being resolved is about 3x that of the original Kinect.



According to Microsoft, Kinect 2.0 can detect your heartbeat, rotations in your wrist or shoulder and the new Xbox controller. It's suggested that this information will directly feed into your game experience, with gameplay reacting to your heightened emotional state.

IMPROVING PERFECTION

HOW MICROSOFT IS UPDATING ITS CONTROLLER FOR THE XBOX ONE

Microsoft understands that its users have fallen in love with the design of the Xbox 360 controller. When approaching a redesign ready for the next generation, the company made the wise decision to improve instead of innovate. The additional changes aren't looking to change the way we play, but to simply make it more comfortable

IMPULSE TRIGGERS

While the shape of the controller is largely unchanged, Microsoft has introduced a few minor tweaks to give developers more control over the way players interact with its products. Thanks to the addition of motors within the triggers, developers can now feed contextual feedback directly to the players fingers, letting them feel the weight of a pulled trigger or the rumble of a car engine.

GUIDE BUTTON

The guide button returns, which should mean players are still at the centre of the Xbox experience, though its purpose has shifted slightly between generations. The four quadrants will no longer light up indicating your player position, as Kinect will automatically identify players sat on the couch, it's the death of arguing over the highly desired Player One slot.

IMPROVED D-PAD

The directional pad was often criticised on the Xbox 360 gamepad, with fighting fans up in arms over its clunky design that prohibited precision. With Xbox One, Microsoft is improving the design from the outset, replacing the disk with a simple cross that lets off a satisfying click with every motion towards that precious Hadouken.

ELEGANT DESIGN

Microsoft claims over 40 design innovations have gone into the controller redesign, so expect it to look and feel better than ever. While the controller has a high-speed data port for future accessories and charging the unit, it does still accept AA batteries, though the cradle has now been integrated directly into the back of the gamepad.

ANALOGUE STICKS

Marc Whitten went on the record saying the controller was "designed by gamers for gamers for the next generation," and that design ethic carries across to every aspect of the pad. The analogue sticks didn't require drastic changes, but they are now smaller and thinner, boasting a tighter dead zone for more precision, perfect for first-person shooters.

VIEW BUTTON

The View button is one of a few minor changes to the gamepad, replacing the 'back' button, its functionality can change depending on how developers want to utilise it. It can be used to provide more information to players, whether in-app or in-game, and its purpose can range from enhancing the dashboard's user interface to displaying a leaderboard in game.



Xbox Live will, as always, play a big part in the Xbox experience. However, a handful of small changes are coming that could have big ramifications with how we interact with the Xbox One and its content in the future

1 The Xbox Live interface has been redesigned to let players utilise the new features coming with the Xbox One. Continuing to build the service so it is aesthetically in line with Microsoft's Windows 8 OS, Xbox Live has been designed to let players seamlessly switch between applications such as live TV and games.

2 Microsoft has elected to restrict your digital library to the 360, so don't expect to be able to carry your arcade games over to the Xbox One, though your Gamercard will. That means your Gamertag, Gold account, Gamerscore and hard earned Achievements will all make the transition – letting players continue to build their online legacy.

3 The Xbox One is going to drastically redefine how we interact with digital games, as Microsoft is removing the divide between full and arcade releases. It could go either way; giving arcade games a bigger spotlight in the main store, or will mean smaller games drown amongst the bigger releases. There will be ways to balance this out.

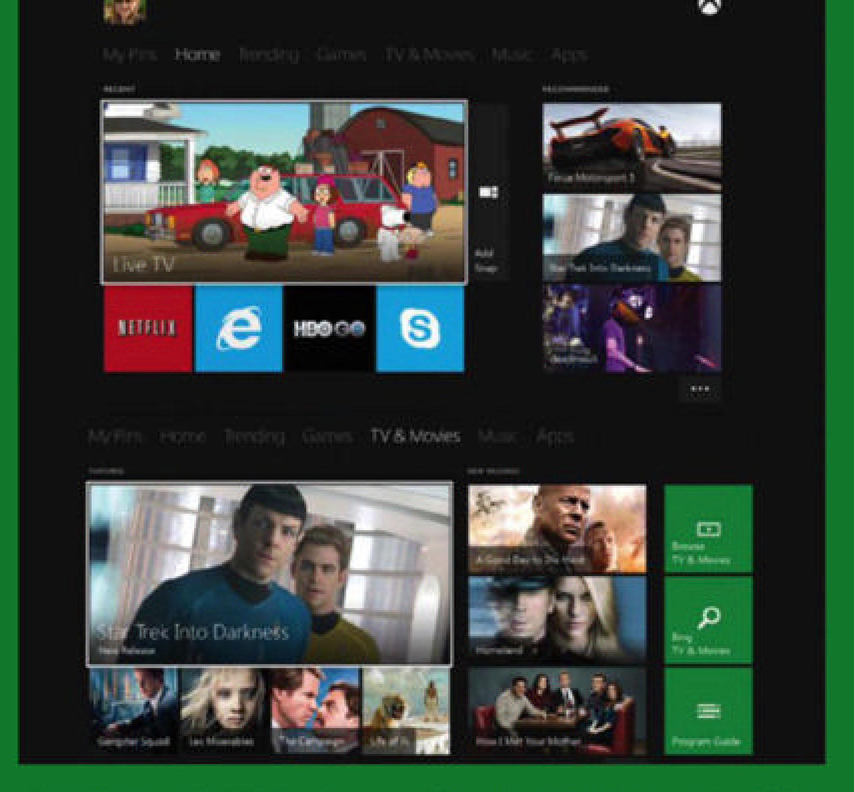
4 The Xbox One will almost certainly struggle to maintain a weekly Arcade release, as independent developers will now require a publisher to get a game onto the service. Removing the ability for studios to self publish could act as a quality gate, but it does mean we are unlikely to get as many new IP.

5 Microsoft has taken notice of Sony's share features, implementing a similar system that captures videos as you earn Achievements. While most Achievements tend to pop up during black transition screens for completing chapters, its an interesting idea that looks to extend Xbox Live's functionality.

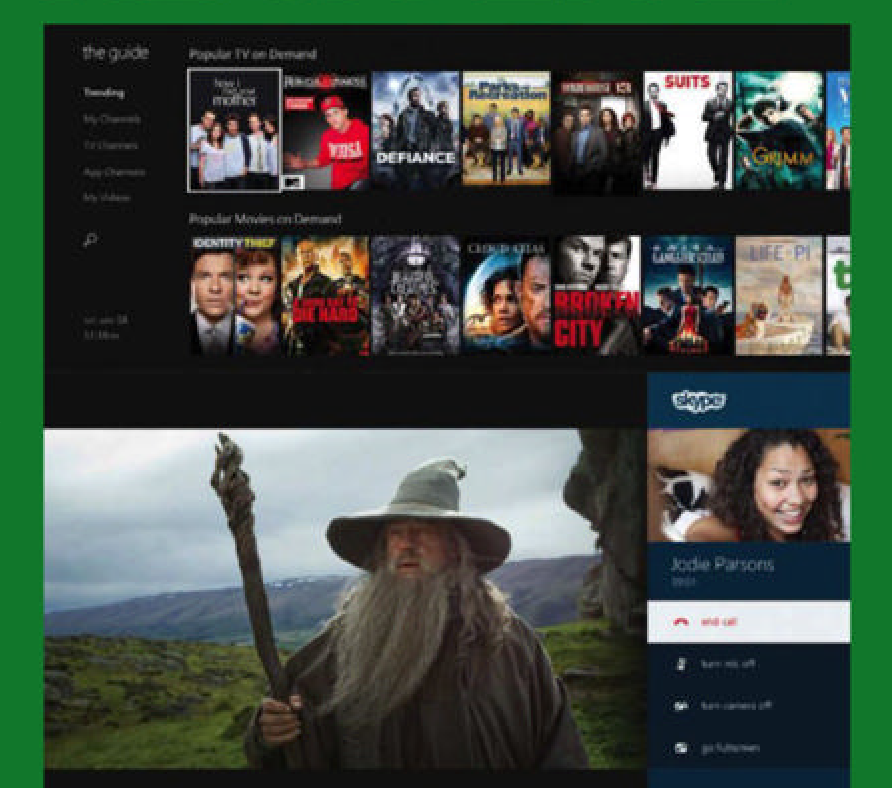
6 A big part of the reveal was dedicated to Xbox Live's ability to multitask, letting players split part of their screens away to play fantasy football while watching ESPN, use Skype while playing a game or browse the internet while watching a film. Impressive technology, but we do question how much players will use it.

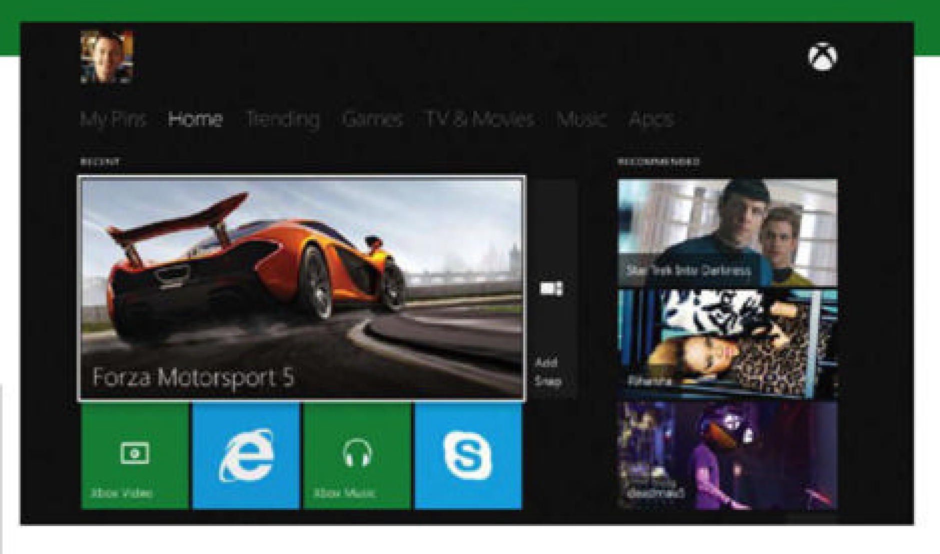
7 Back when the Xbox 360 first launched, Microsoft touted the console's ability to dynamically matchmake players together for online games through reputation and common friends for better online experiences. It rarely worked, but Smart Match returns for Xbox One, promising to dynamically find games for players in the background for instant play.

8 Adapting to the devices in our lives, the Xbox One is designed to utilise Xbox SmartGlass from the outset. The application is going to have more functionality than ever, with multiple devices able to connect for multiplayer and shared entertainment. As long as Microsoft can improve response time, this is a welcomed addition to the platform.



EXPLORING THE NEW FACE OF XBOX LIVE





DELVING INTO THE DISCUSSION SURROUNDING THE XBOX ONE'S USED GAME DRM

The biggest point of contention following the Xbox One announcement concerns Microsoft's policy on pre-owned and digital games and, despite some attempts at clarification by Microsoft, at the time of print we can only sift through the numerous conflicting reports to try and provide some clarity. With EA ditching the online pass system days before the next generation became a reality, the truth is that Xbox One will feature some form of DRM and pre-owned restrictions, though for the games industry it might not be as bad as the vocal minority expect.

Microsoft's message out of the Xbox One announcement has been mixed. The company's approach to positioning the new Xbox at the centre of the living room, without revealing its videogame plans to the core audience, paled in comparison to Sony's more in-depth reveal of the PlayStation 4. Where both consoles have struggled however, is defining a position on the pre-owned market. While Sony appeared to be rather quiet on the matter following the Xbox One reveal, Microsoft has adopted a less consistent approach. The message is unclear, with Microsoft executives saying different things to different outlets, but despite all of the confusion there are some solid ideas hidden away. It looks like Microsoft is making a valiant effort to make a transition towards a digital-centric world, and in doing so, much of the conversation is shifting towards licensing and ownership rights.

As all titles now need to be installed to the hard drive, games will need to authenticate and tie to an active profile to function. Players can still take games to their friends' houses, but they will need to sign into Xbox Live before they can activate the install on a different machine. This does of course effectively kill the ability to lend your friends games, unless you're willing to trust them with your entire profile, but in reality such a move could help our flagging industry. The word is that retailers will still be able to sell pre-owned games, but the publishers and manufacturer will finally receive a majority cut of the profits. If a thriving pre-owned market still exists with the next generation, with publishers and developers receiving money throughout a games shelf life, it only means more support and better opportunities for new IP moving forward.

While it has been mostly buried by all the contentious talk surrounding the pre-owned market, it also looks like Microsoft is planning to offer digital game trade-ins, a move that can only appease those ready for the next generation. Digital has presented a problem for the big two console creators in trying to appease retail. The prices remain sky high, but with the Xbox One and PlayStation 4 the shift is inevitable. Microsoft announced this capability briefly, though it became buried in the reveal announcement. "We will have a solution – we're not talking about it today – for you to be able to trade your previously-played games online," Phil Harrison told Kotaku. Again, though, specifics were not forthcoming, leaving us to wonder how it will be actually be addressed by Microsoft.

The current console cycle is the longest in the history of the videogame industry, and these possible restrictions placed on how we buy and sell games aren't an afterthought that Microsoft conjured in its ivory tower. These sorts of decisions are concessions made for publishers, which some may see as anti-consumer, but in reality are a compromise we have no choice but to accept.

> **"The message is unclear, with multiple Microsoft executives saying different things to different outlets, but despite all of the confusion there are some solid ideas hidden away"**

Hashtags on Twitter and online petitions hold no weight in the discussion, and the backlash we are seeing is a diversion on the discussions we should be holding. The companies don't react to what you say, but rather what you do – and voting with your wallet will be the only way they will listen. From early reports, retailers like Blockbuster and Game are seeing pre-orders at an all-time high for the Xbox One, and the flagging sales of the Wii U – the only next-generation machine currently on the market – which lacks any sort of DRM or used game restriction, just goes to show Sony and Microsoft that consumers are ready for a paradigm shift.

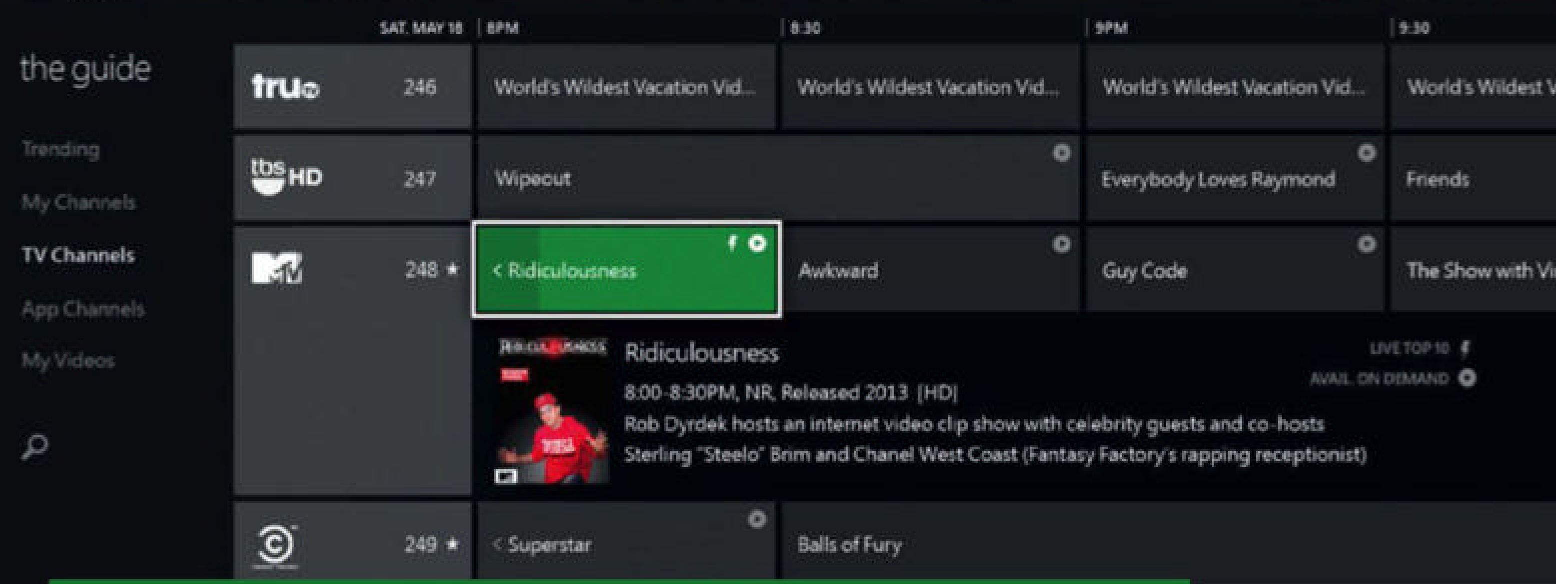
Whatever Microsoft is doing with used games and DRM, expect Sony to address this in its own way. Either way, with or without DRM, Microsoft demonstrated an extremely commercial reveal for the Xbox One that will secure its early reputation with fans of massive franchises. This next generation is likely to see a return of war for exclusives, at least in the first few years, and with Microsoft already locking down exclusive content for *FIFA 14* and timed DLC for *Call Of Duty: Ghosts*, we're intrigued to see how Sony will respond. DRM is still a small part of the overall subject.

The next generation is going to be defined by change and shifting consumption patterns, and the companies are likely to look towards PC, where the dominant platform is Steam, again another closed platform that restricts used and rented games. As long as the Xbox One and PlayStation 4 can sort out its digital pricing structures, the issue of ownership will no doubt loudly fade away, but we won't know for certain until we are hooking the machines up underneath our televisions later this year.



Observe, the shade of green that will soon make the 360 green obsolete.





WHY XBOX TV IS A BIG DEAL, JUST NOT FOR US

A Spielberg-produced Halo series? The possibility of reviving Heroes exclusively on Xbox Live? Alright, from a hardcore gaming perspective, it's not terribly interesting, bur Microsoft's venture into original TV content is a big deal that could have larger ramifications for the platform – here are six reasons why it might just work…

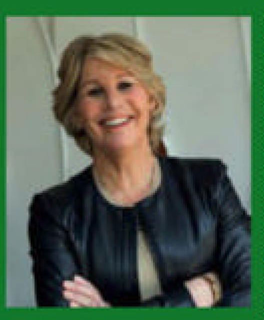
Original programming

AMAZON AND Netflix have both ramped up their original content offerings – *House Of Cards* and the revival of *Arrested Development* are the two most notable examples so far, both from Netflix. For TV fans, they're emerging as well-priced rivals to traditional walled gardens of cable content, as viable HBO alternatives. It's an increasingly lucrative business model that Microsoft no doubt wants to replicate on Xbox Live.



Big names

STEVEN SPIELBERG'S involvement in a *Halo* TV series is a big deal right now, but it's not a guarantee of a great sci-fi drama. *Falling Skies*, *Smash* and *The River* all have Spielberg as an executive producer, and those series aren't exactly the peak of modern entertainment – if *Halo* is coming to TV screens, it has to be a drama of competitive quality to the best series out there, otherwise it'll just be preaching to the converted.



Smart minds behind the operation

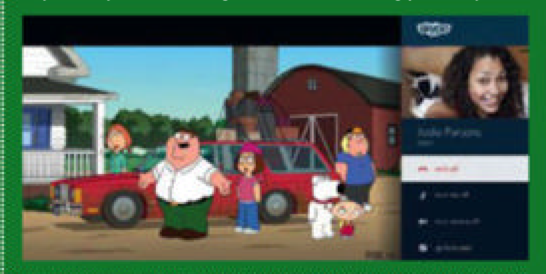
NANCY TELLEM has a legacy in creating hits at CBS, most notably the *CSI* series and *Survivor*. In building an Xbox TV brand, there can't be anyone more qualified to put it together – Tellem's presence at the event was a statement of intent. "At this very moment, our talented teams in Los Angeles, Seattle, Vancouver and London are using the magic and science of Xbox to re-think dramas, comedies, competition shows, sports, live events, and digital shorts," she said during the conference.

It fits with Xbox Live

YOU ALREADY have an Xbox Live Gold subscription – could Microsoft be expanding its benefits? If Microsoft wants to integrate TV services within Xbox Live, it's well-positioned to do so, given that it's already convinced millions of gamers to fork out for online multiplayer. *Spartan Ops*, the weekly DLC component of *Halo 4*, could have been the litmus test for this sort of model.

Functionality is built around TV

SNAP MODE and instant switching between movies, apps and games. The idea is to use your Xbox One as a conduit to other TV devices – at the time of writing, support for this from Great Britain's major satellite providers isn't set in stone, with Sky in early talks and Virgin Media commenting positively.



Microsoft's deep pockets

MICROSOFT HAS the money to make a TV division a huge deal. It's not a cheap business to get into, but Microsoft can bring this to life without compromising on budgets; observe short films made in conjunction with *Halo* releases. We assume it's had its eye on this kind of move for a while.



> Utilising the power of the Xbox One, Turn 10 has been able to render cars and tracks that border photorealism

FORZA MOTORSPORT 5

The future of virtual racing revealed

ORIGIN: **USA** / PUBLISHER: **Microsoft Game Studios** / DEVELOPER: **Turn 10**

MICROSOFT MIGHT HAVE fifteen exclusive titles in development for the Xbox One, but it was *Forza Motorsport* that the company chose to demonstrate the power of its next generation system.

Turn 10 is returning *Forza* to its racing-simulation roots following last years open world experiment, *Horizon*, and the series has never looked better. Utilising the power of the Xbox One, Turn 10 has been able to render cars and tracks that border photorealism. Prague was used to showcase the new engine, with the narrow city streets turning into the playground for the McLaren F1, as it races its brother the P1 in stunning detail.

Forza Motorsport has traditionally been Microsoft's answer to Sony's *Gran Turismo*, but with *Turismo* delving into another PlayStation 3 iteration before the generation is over, Turn 10's effort will be going head-to-head with Evolution's *DriveClub* for pole position this Christmas, and from the look of this first trailer, we like its chances.

Where *DriveClub* looks to be putting its stock into recreating the social elements of car clubs, *Forza Motorsport 5* will likely continue to focus on creating digital racing perfection. Turn 10 has steadily been refining its formula over the last eight years, and *Forza 5* is the natural next step in the franchise.

The hardware behind the Xbox One is impressive, and it's clear from the footage revealed at the Redmond, Washington event, that Microsoft now has the technology to remove the boundaries between digital and physical. *Forza* has always aimed to emulate the performance and handling characteristics of its vehicles, and we expect Turn 10 to build an engine that will let us experience the Japanese Tsukuba Circuit without resorting to committing a multitude of criminal offences.

A big cornerstone of the *Forza* franchise has always been car customisation, though we will need to wait until E3 before Turn 10 give us a look underneath the hood. With the considerable power behind *Forza 5*'s engine, as well as the improvements to the Xbox Live infrastructure, we wouldn't be surprised to see Microsoft placing a new emphasis on the automobile retail and trade aspects that have developed with the online community over the years.

Interestingly, it looks like Microsoft will be extending the gameplay off of the screen and into your hands. The redesigned Xbox One controller features 'Impulse Triggers', which will let Turn 10 introduce traction and context sensitive rumbles to your actions. Imagine the tension of an important race only growing as your fingers respond, at first, to the feel of the asphalt and then to rough grass after a bad corner; it's going to give us a new excuse for activating racing lines.

Without getting actual hands-on time with *Forza Motorsport 5* it's impossible for us to tell how the Xbox One will improve gameplay, but we can safely confirm that it is going to be a beautiful launch title for the console. At this rate, if the rumours of a revived *Project Gotham Racing* become true, then the Xbox One could turn out to be the home of racing games for the next gen.





Forza Motorsport 5 looks to be a more traditional racing title following the open world spin-off *Forza Horizon.*

We approached Remedy for answers, but the studio wasn't prepared to give any at the time of writing. We imagine the mystery of *Quantum Break* will be part of the fun.

> Attempting to seamlessly intertwine a live action show with a videogame is a gigantic undertaking



QUANTUM BREAK

Bridging the gap between interactive entertainments

ORIGIN: **Finland** / PUBLISHER: **Microsoft Game Studios** / DEVELOPER: **Remedy Entertainment**

IT'S BEEN A long three years since Remedy Entertainment unleashed *Alan Wake*, and while we had heard rumours that a sequel was on the way, the studio has finally unveiled what it has been dedicating its attention to: a brand new IP built around the Xbox One's unique capabilities.

One of the fifteen exclusive Xbox One titles due within a year of the system's launch, *Quantum Break* presents a world where live action television and videogames collide. Considering the strong emphasis Microsoft placed on television's shoulders during the reveal event, we wouldn't be surprised to see Remedy leading the Xbox One's campaign as the platform holder looks to redefine interactive experiences across the next generation.

The Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3 were fast approaching a graphical plateau, so when approaching the next hardware cycle, we need to be aware of the limitations. The leap between systems won't be as great as it was between Xbox and 360, though *Quantum Break*'s type of ambitious interactive experience that should come to define this future generation.

The pre-rendered *Quantum Break* trailer was frustratingly light on details, with every second of the reveal bringing far more questions to light than it decided to answer. Splitting its attention between quiet conversation and bombastic action, *Quantum Break* looks to break the fourth wall, placing you in the shoes of both the viewer of a television drama and as a detective in an unravelling mystery.

This is a brand new entertainment experience, so it's difficult for us to anticipate quite how this will unfold. The actions you take and the choices you make throughout the game will apparently shape the narrative of the intertwined television show, with the show's pacing and story shifting because of your decisions. It sounds like the most ambitious 'choose your own adventure' story ever crafted, and at this early stage we don't know whether this will be an episodic adventure expanded via DLC or simply an unavoidable assault on the Xbox One's 500GB hard drive.

It's transmedia storytelling at its most meta, though we do worry that a game so heavily invested in interactive and inventive storytelling within the videogame industry will come across as deplorably cheesy. Traditionally what passes for stellar writing in the videogame industry wouldn't stand a chance on the silver screen – and we don't mean that as a slight towards Remedy – but attempting to seamlessly intertwine a live action show with a videogame is a gigantic undertaking. The debut trailer didn't exactly fill us with confidence, though the *Alan Wake* webisode run back in 2010 was surprisingly entertaining, so we'll chalk this jarring debut down to bad child actors until further footage is released.

It's clear we won't quite understand exactly what Remedy has planned until the curtain is lifted, but if the promise of a seamless integration between TV and videogames can come to fruition, coupled with the intriguing time travel elements that were weaved into the initial reveal, then we could have something special on our hands. *Quantum Break* is going to be divisive, there's no question about that, but provocative games from such developers can bring real identity to the medium.

Four new EA Sports titles are due within the first year of Xbox One. These are *FIFA 14*, *Madden NFL 25*, *NBA Live 14*, and *UFC Championship*.

FIFA 14 will be the first to launch running on the new EA Sports Ignite engine, designed to showcase the power of next-generation systems.

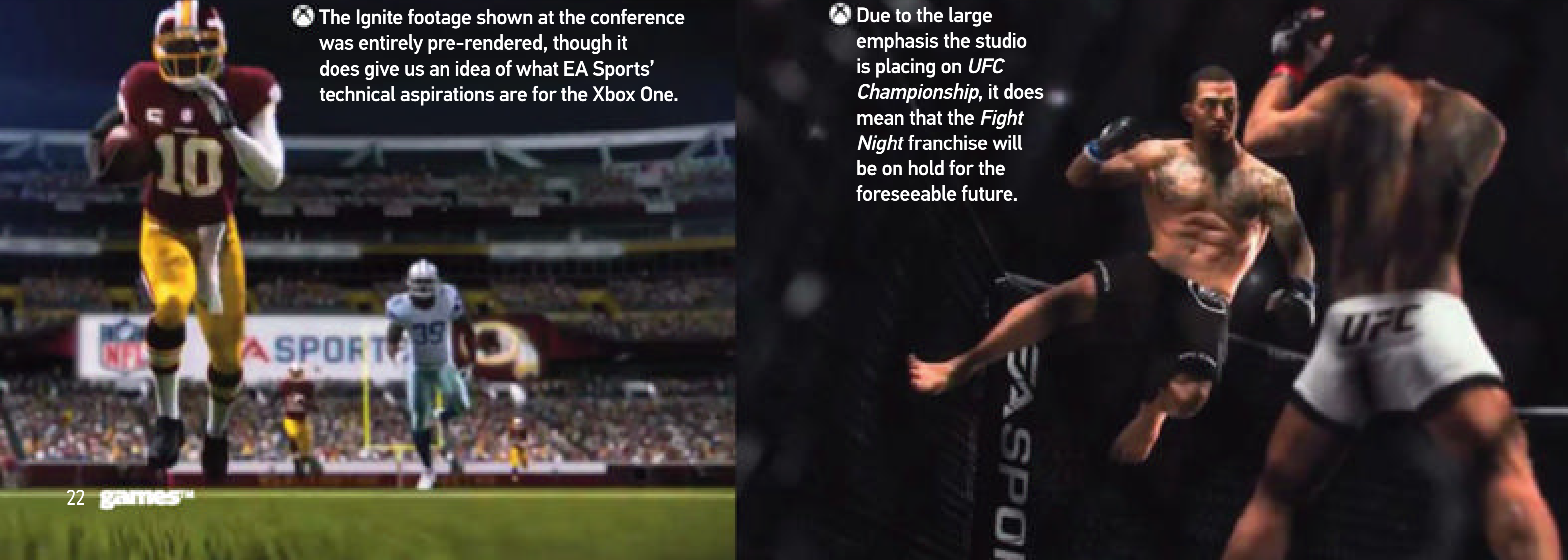
EA's partnership with Microsoft brings certain benefits and *FIFA* players will be the first to see the results, as *FIFA 14* receives exclusive content for the Ultimate Team game mode.

Andrew Wilson described the Ignite engine as being able to provide "ten times more animation detail" and will "allow players to make decisions with four times more calculations per second."

7 REASONS TO GET EXCITED ABOUT EA SPORTS ON XBOX ONE

MICROSOFT'S PRESS CONFERENCE may have dedicated a lot of time to explaining how the new system is staging a hostile takeover of the living room, but we were also given a preview of some of the games Microsoft sees as crucial on Xbox One: namely, EA's giant sports titles. EA Sports' executive vice president Andrew Wilson took to the stage at the reveal event to detail the publisher's new "broad strategic partnership" with Microsoft, revealing four titles are in development for Xbox One for release within the next 12 months. The reveal was light on tangible information, so we've boiled down the essential things you need to know about EA Sports on Xbox One.

EA has always been a fan of making big promises, this time claiming that the Ignite engine has the power to take digital realism to a whole new level.



The Ignite footage shown at the conference was entirely pre-rendered, though it does give us an idea of what EA Sports' technical aspirations are for the Xbox One.

Due to the large emphasis the studio is placing on *UFC Championship*, it does mean that the *Fight Night* franchise will be on hold for the foreseeable future.



> From the fire particles to the explosions in the distance, Black Flag is going to be an incredibly immersive experience

ASSASSIN'S CREED IV: BLACK FLAG

Reclaiming the generation

ORIGIN: **Canada** / PUBLISHER: **Ubisoft** / DEVELOPER: **Ubisoft Montreal**

ONE OF THE industry's biggest franchises is making the jump to the next generation this year, as *Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag* brings the high seas to Xbox One and PlayStation 4.

Following the popularity of the naval battles in *Assassin's Creed III*, players will now be able to transition seamlessly from land to sea – and this facet of design extends past simply leaping from the crow's nest to hunt for sunken treasures, as you'll now be able to dynamically assault any ships that foolishly cross your path.

Whether it's through the act of leaping from one deck to the other, or free running between mainsails, anyone with dreams of eighteenth century piracy will undoubtedly be satisfied. Ubisoft has promised that players will be able to do this easily on both current and next generation systems, and while we can see Xbox One and PlayStation 4 handling the requirements thanks to the excessive 8GB of RAM powering the systems, we do wonder if the current gen versions will astound us as they usually do when it comes to visuals.

It's still early days, but it looks like Ubisoft is trying to atone for the mistakes it made with *Assassin's Creed III*. Many felt suffocated by the linearity of the experience, but with the Caribbean Sea and the golden age of piracy as a colourful and vibrant playground, this could be the most expansive entry into the series yet. The scope and scale of the open-world is a massive undertaking for Ubisoft Montreal, so the studio is receiving help from seven other Ubisoft studios around the world in an attempt to get the game finished on time.

It's likely that the next-gen iterations will see a hefty graphical update, with latest look at *Black Flag* impressing thanks to some incredibly detailed textures and startlingly pretty fire effects. If you're thinking of holding off on a new console this winter, you might quickly change your mind once you see the third-party games in motion.

The yearly cycle has clearly begun to take its toll on the *Assassin's Creed* franchise, though with Desmond finally out of the picture, *Black Flag* is a chance for the studio to take the series in a fresh direction. Players are now being placed directly into the Animus, and so the opportunity to tell a personal plight against the Templars has presented itself, though whether Ubisoft decides to embrace this aspect of *Black Flag* will likely inform how positively fans receive it when it releases this November.

WATCH DOGS

Defining the next generation

Aiden Pierce can hack into the entire cities infrastructure through his PDA. With a phone, he is deadly, able to take control and utilise any technological device within Chicago's borders.

ORIGIN: **Canada** / PUBLISHER: **Ubisoft** / DEVELOPER: **Ubisoft Montreal**

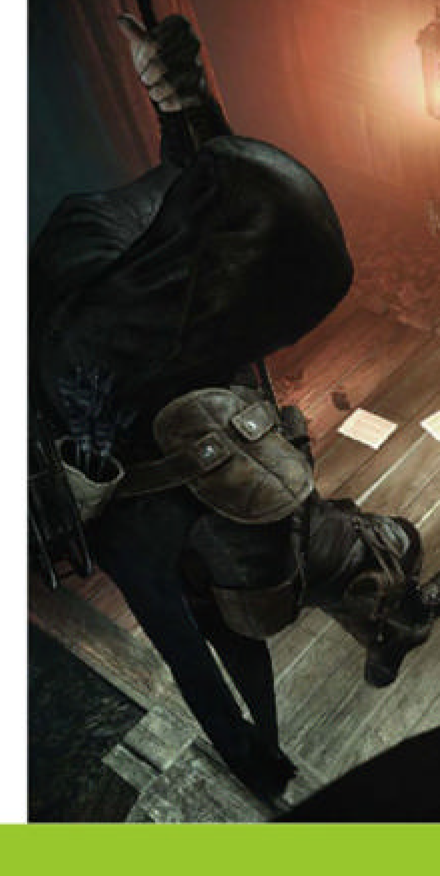
UBISOFT HAS OFTEN been the studio that looks to push the boundaries of any new console, and on the eve of the Xbox One and PlayStation 4's release, the publisher is looking to recreate the success it found with *Assassin's Creed* with a brand new IP, *Watch Dogs*.

Assassin's Creed paved the way for expansive open worlds when it launched in 2007, giving gamers a glimpse into what the future of Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3 could offer. It had its fair share of problems of course, with many considering the original to be no more than a well-produced tech-demo, but *Assassin's Creed* has steadily expanded its horizons to become one of the largest franchises in gaming. Ubisoft isn't likely to repeat the mistakes of the past, with *Watch Dogs* already shaping up to be quite the package.

Investigating the true crux of a totalitarian state, *Watch Dogs* is letting players run wild through a city where surveillance has come to define its purpose. Placing players into the shoes of Aiden Pierce, a skilled hacker on a path of revenge, we will be granted the power to hack into any electrical system in Chicago. *Watch Dogs* is an action adventure game with a heavy slant on information warfare, letting players turn societies obsession with technology into a weapon.

A lot has been said about Ubisoft Montreal's efforts as we get ever closer to its release on 22 November 2013, but many of its gameplay details are still shrouded in mystery. We've seen in the past how Aiden will be able to use criminal records and the city's surveillance systems to track and hunt criminals that have escaped the law, and how he can even manipulate the traffic grids to say, slow down a train long enough for him to leap on top of it to make a quick escape – though we haven't seen how this will all work in the context of an open world so heavily steeped in narrative. Ubisoft Montreal has sometimes promised more than it can deliver in the past, but *Watch Dogs* is a genuine flash of excitement in an industry still so obsessed with generating sequels.

With the power of the next generation systems we're hopeful that this new IP will be a window into the future of gaming. The developer has hinted towards *Watch Dogs* seamlessly connecting the single and multiplayer worlds together, presenting a dynamic open world where players will not only have to contend with the villains of the game world – but the digital world as well. It's an ambitious undertaking; we can't wait to get our hands on it.





NEED FOR SPEED: RIVALS

The spiritual successor to Hot Pursuit

ORIGIN: **Sweden** / PUBLISHER: **EA** / DEVELOPER: **Ghost Games**

FOLLOWING THE HUGE success of *Most Wanted*, the *Need For Speed* franchise has never been healthier. Yet, despite its popularity, Criterion Games' creative director Alex Ward recently voiced his intention to steer the studio away from developing racing games, with the studio eager to put its talents towards different genres. Instead of handing the keys of the franchise over to an established studio, EA is giving Ghost Games, previously EA Gothenburg, the opportunity to release a debut title worth remembering.

Similar to *Most Wanted*, *Need For Speed: Rivals* will feature an open world with plenty of challenges and collectibles to uncover. *Rivals* is however putting a greater emphasis on the Cops vs. Racers mode, letting players take on either side of the law to unlock new cars and customisation options. It's a spiritual successor to *Hot Pursuit* in all but name.

Ghost Games will of course be utilising EA's Frostbite 3 Engine, which is powering the likes of *Battlefield 4*, to create an immensely slick racer that could have the capacity to challenge its peers this winter. The calibre of talent on the Ghost Games team includes *Project Gotham Racing*, *Forza* and *Need For Speed* alumni – along with Criterion overseeing the project – *Rivals* seems to be in capable hands. Building off of a popular entry into a franchise is no easy task, but we are excited to see what EA can get out of the system.

With *Need For Speed*'s high intensity chases and impressive graphical fidelity, *Rivals* is likely to be an essential third-party launch title for the next-generation systems. As long as Ghost Games can refine the all-important driving mechanics to the same polish present in Criterion's games, then we have nothing to worry about.



Powered by the Frostbite 3 Engine, expect *Need For Speed: Rivals* to be one of the best-looking games of 2013. It's confirmed for Xbox One and PlayStation 4, as well as Xbox 360, PlayStation 3 and PC.



With the Xbox One finally announced, Eidos Montreal is now free to talk openly about the impressive work it is doing on the next generation systems. Expect to hear a lot about *Thief* in the coming months.

THIEF

Stepping out of the shadows

ORIGIN: **Canada** / PUBLISHER: **Square Enix** / DEVELOPER: **Eidos Montreal**

AFTER A DECADE away, Garrett is stepping out of the shadows to reinvent the stealth genre for the next generation.

Thief is coming to Xbox One and PlayStation 4 in 2014, promising a beautifully detailed world for the would-be master thieves among us to lighten the pockets of the wealthy that have submerged the City into filth and chaos.

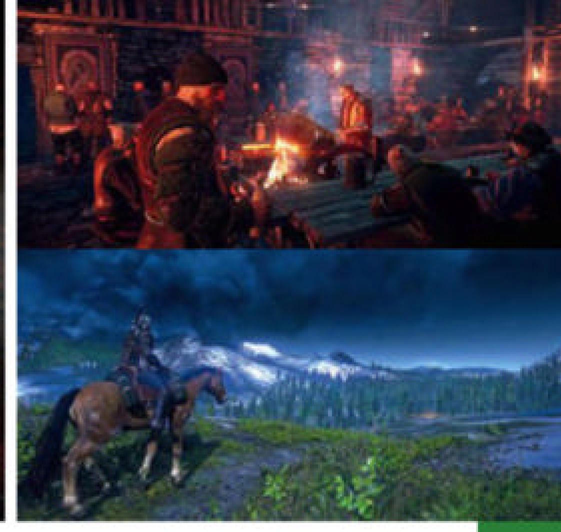
"The player should expect to fully live the fantasy of being a master thief in an immersive world. A city with different possibilities and multiple layers to explore and play with," says game director Nicolas Cantin when we quiz him on what fans should expect from *Thief* on Xbox One.

"The Xbox One is exciting, it gives us a lot of new opportunities to make the game shine on different levels. The opportunity to have a lot of variations for our gameplay elements and mechanics is something really important for us," Cantin said, adding. "And the Xbox One is delivering on that aspect. It also allows us to push the boundaries for the graphics and gives us a more credible mood within the world of *Thief*. This really adds to the emotional aspect we want to convey in the game."

Now that the Xbox One has finally been revealed, we expect Eidos itself will finally start revealing more to the public. *Thief* is coming together fantastically, with our recent excursion to the Montreal studio (see **games™** 134) revealing a game destined to showcase the early capabilities of the next-gen systems.



The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt is the end of Geralt's saga, with CD Projekt Red moving onto new stories within Rivia for future instalments.



THE WITCHER 3: WILD HUNT

Geralt makes his last stand

ORIGIN: **Poland** / PUBLISHER: **CD Project RED** / DEVELOPER: **In-house**

CD PROJEKT RED is becoming a developer worth keeping a close eye on as it continues to develop its portfolio of games. The previous *Witcher* games have been a fantastic gateway into author Andrzej Sapkowski's extensive world, though Wild Hunt looks to be the most faithful instalment yet. CD Projekt RED is eager to put players into the gnarled boots of a Witcher, and thanks to the power of the Xbox One and PlayStation 4, the studio will finally be able to realise its ambition. A lot has been said about the game's transition to an open world, reported to be 20 per cent larger than that of *Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*, but it is the monster hunting elements that have us truly excited for the first RPG of the next generation.

After scouting out towns and settlements, Geralt will be able to pick up quests to defeat large monsters that are terrorising the land, putting his unique skill set to use. This will be monster hunting like you've never experienced before; against the backdrop of a multi-faction war, Geralt will need to track, gear-up, and learn the lay of the land before he eventually confronts the beastly horrors of Rivia. CD Projekt RED has been reluctant to show off the power of the RED Engine 3, with all of the available screenshots still being rendered with its old lighting engine, but after the impressive tease of *Cyberpunk 2077* and the promise of *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt*, we are expecting to be blown away.



There are only a handful of developers in the world who could take on such an ambitious project, but Bungie has earned a respect in the science fiction genre that no other studio in the industry could match.

DESTINY

What's next for the Halo creators?

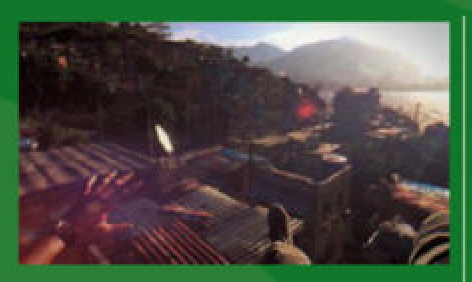
ORIGIN: **USA** / PUBLISHER: **Activision** / DEVELOPER: **Bungie**

WE'VE BEEN EAGERLY anticipating Bungie's first non-*Halo* project since leaving Microsoft's nest to broaden its horizons. In 2007 the studio split from Microsoft and set its sights on a brand new franchise, leaving *Halo* behind forever.

Bungie has since revealed *Destiny*, an ambitious 'shared-world shooter' that looks to blend the expansive elements of massively-multiplayer online games with the competitive science-fiction shooter aspects of Master Chief's domain. Designed as an always-online shooter from the outset, *Destiny* is going to take players on a universe-trotting adventure to reclaim the Earth in its final hours.

Despite being built to appease online fanatics, you can go out into the world alone if you prefer. Other players will be seen on your journey, though it is up to you whether or not you want to quest with your peers. Bungie hasn't revealed the finer details on the party system just yet, but after spending time in Trion Worlds' *Defiance* earlier this year, we wouldn't be surprised to see a similar model put into place – all players in a local area to a quest will work towards similar goals, abolishing the queues for key item objectives and the wrestling for kills on low-spawning mobs of enemies that often spoil the MMO experience for many players.

Destiny is launching later this year, and Bungie has big plans for its new sci-fi venture. A ten-year publishing plan with Activision underlines the studio's ambition. We will be playing *Destiny* for years to come, be sure to get in on the ground floor.



DYING LIGHT

DETAILS
ORIGIN: **Iceland**
PUBLISHER: **Warner Bros. Interactive**
DEVELOPER: **Techland**

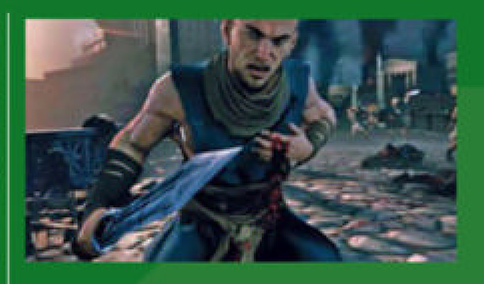
TECHLAND HAS TAKEN the *Dead Island* franchise as far as it can in its current form, so we welcome the developer moving onto a new IP, a first-person survival action game called *Dying Light*, and it looks like a natural evolution of everything that has come before it. An open world zombie survival game infused with the parkour elements of *Mirror's Edge*, players will need to quickly use the daylight to prepare for the night, as once the sun drops, the undead will begin to siege your stronghold. If Techland can iron out its numerous game engine bugs, this will be one to keep an eye on.



THE EVIL WITHIN

DETAILS
ORIGIN: **Japan**
PUBLISHER: **Bethesda Softworks**
DEVELOPER: **Tango Gameworks**

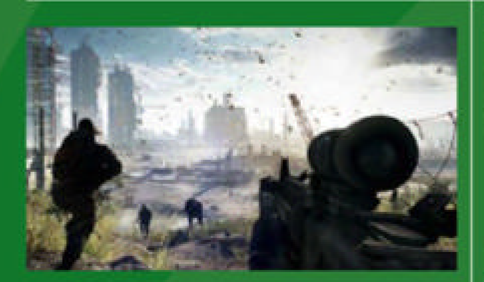
THE EVIL WITHIN sees the return of *Resident Evil* creator Shinji Mikami to the genre he once helped pioneer, with a new psychological horror that's ramping up the scares in every way imaginable. Survival horror games have lost their edge this generation, thankfully *The Evil Within* looks absolutely terrifying, with our recent eyes-on with the game revealing a core experience dripping with tension. Exploring the claustrophobic corridors of a mental asylum and sleepy hollow towns as a detective investigating a multiple homicide, *The Evil Within* will hopefully redefine the true definition of horror in interactive entertainment.



RYSE

DETAILS
ORIGIN: **Germany**
PUBLISHER: **Microsoft Game Studios**
DEVELOPER: **Crytek**

ONE OF THE 15 exclusives in the works for the Xbox One, Crytek's first person hack-and-slash adventure was originally unveiled as a Kinect game in 2011, but it has been completely retooled for the new console. Putting players into the shoes of a soldier at the height of the Roman Empire, *Ryse* will now utilise controller-based gameplay that will be further enhanced by Kinect. The improved Kinect is supposed to be more responsive than ever though, as always, any mention of the device conjures all sorts of negative connotations. Hopefully Crytek can deliver a Kinect experience for the core crowd.



BATTLEFIELD 4

DETAILS
ORIGIN: **Sweden**
PUBLISHER: **EA**
DEVELOPER: **DICE**

NOT CONTENT WITH letting *Call Of Duty* have all of the next-gen fun, *Battlefield 4* is coming to Xbox One ready for Christmas 2013. Powered by the Frostbite 3 Engine, expect the game to look incredible with the considerable power of the new consoles behind it. DICE is eager to produce a single-player experience that leaves a lasting impression, alongside its expected offering of expansive multiplayer warfare. *Battlefield* games have always been at home on the PC, though now is the time for the franchise to jump the number of soldiers on a battlefield up from 24 to at least the PC standard of 64.



SNIPER ELITE III

DETAILS
ORIGIN: **UK**
PUBLISHER: **505 Games**
DEVELOPER: **Rebellion**

FOLLOWING THE SUCCESS of *Sniper Elite V2*, Rebellion is preparing a sequel for next and current generation systems for 2014. *Sniper Elite III* will expand the story of Karl Fairburne and will continue to explore his adventures through World War II Germany. The game is set to move away from the linearity of its predecessor; Rebellion is hoping to engineer the core of the game to allow a sandbox approach to *Elite*'s grizzly sniper kills. With the power of the next generation systems behind it, we can only hope the developer has the ambition to introduce more intelligent AI into its next outing.



RAINBOW 6: PATRIOTS

DETAILS
ORIGIN: **Canada**
PUBLISHER: **Ubisoft**
DEVELOPER: **Ubisoft Montreal**

IT'S ALREADY BEEN two years since we heard anything on the latest instalment to the *Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six* franchise. It's safe to assume that Ubisoft has held *Patriots* back for Xbox One and PlayStation 4 in an effort to try and deliver on the promise of that pre-rendered footage that did the rounds in 2011, forced out of Ubisoft Montreal after a leak promised to stunt development progress. Ubisoft's CEO Yves Guillemot went on the record last year claiming that there was a good chance the game could be pushed back for next-gen systems. At the time of writing – just before E3 – we're near-certain it will have reappeared.



THE CONSOLE WAR BEGINS

→ Christmas 2013: who will be in the best position as next-gen truly begins?

Finally bringing to a close many months of speculation and hearsay, the reveal of Xbox One on 21 May was the final piece in the next-generation puzzle. With it, PlayStation 4 and Wii U, the industry's Big Three have laid their cards on the table, setting the paradigm for the years to come.

So what's next? At the time of writing E3 is days away, and each company's strategy remains only broadly defined. However, even at this stage we can perceive a clear direction for each console manufacturer. While Nintendo stands by its traditional console philosophies and Sony is hammering home the games, games and more games message, Microsoft – sensibly or not – continues to beat the drum for the home entertainment hub.

Microsoft's reveal of the Xbox One certainly made this out to be the case, the company opting for a resolutely media-centric approach at an event viewed predominantly by core gamers. Actual games were relegated to blink-and-you'll-miss-it trailers for *Forza* and *Quantum Break* and an utterly uninspiring reveal of *Call Of Duty: Ghosts*. Commercially it might have hit the right beats, but for us, Sony offered a more definitive first look at the future of its hardware and software.

It was a risky communications strategy, Microsoft showcasing what appeared to be an elaborate catch-all box where games were counted as just one of many features. It felt less like a competitor to Sony's heavily game-focused PS4 and more like a new challenger to the likes of Apple TV and Google. It could have been a triumphant moment for Xbox, but focusing on those other elements was always going to get a contentious response from hardcore gamers who only use their 360s for playing games.

Below While Move and Vita will continue to play a big part in Sony's strategy going forwards, it's hard to imagine them having a significant positive impact on the PS4's successes.

Microsoft's problem was that it felt like games were considered a given, based on its successes with the Xbox 360 over the past eight years and generally positive reception for the platform's development since its 2005 launch. There was something of a similarity to the announcement of the PS3, in that focusing on multimedia possibilities of the console gets too far away from what players traditionally respond to; Sony, meanwhile, focused on games with PS4 in a way that put memories of that 2005 unveiling to one side. We have absolutely no doubt that we'll want both consoles under our TVs at the end of the year – this is simply a question of hitting the right notes with the people who adopt this hardware early on.

Core gamers must be Microsoft's main focus for the time being, then, and the original

DATA STREAM → WHORE OF THE ORIENT DEVELOPMENT SUSPENDED, EX-STAFF FORM NEW INDIE STUDIO

Contents

Your guide to the essential stories

For daily news updates and exclusive interviews

facebook.com/gamesTM

@gamesTMmag

gplus.to/gamesTMmagazine



reveal was only one part of its overall plan. E3 for Microsoft was about taking the opportunity to show that the next generation of Xbox is indeed going to be a solid gaming machine first and foremost. The teased line-up of 15 exclusive launch window titles, eight of which are new IPs, should go some way to achieving this. With a robust stable of exclusives, delivered with less market-focused, corporate newspeak, the entire perception of both consoles could turn around innumerable times before they launch in late 2013.

THERE ARE OTHER areas that Microsoft needs to work on clarifying too, if it wants to dominate the market this Christmas. As discussed earlier in this issue, there's more than a bit of confusion about used game sales and how DRM will change the way we think about the secondhand market. It's not a small issue to most players, and such things wouldn't have been as hotly debated by press and gamers were they addressed right away. Similarly, some have taken umbrage to Microsoft's approach to indie development. Corporate vice president Phil Harrison recently revealed the plans for the Xbox One to combine retail games, Xbox Live Arcade and Xbox Live Indie Games into one single section.

Theoretically this would leave no self-publishing route for new indie developers to get their games out onto the marketplace – something that maybe indicates a lack of foresight on Microsoft's part. While Valve's Steam platform continues to be incredibly popular with indies, and Sony and Nintendo are both addressing independent development with new publishing initiatives on PSN and the Nintendo eShop, Microsoft apparently has its own indie initiatives in motion.

"The whole perception of each console could turn around innumerable times before launch"



Below With regards to hardware, both PS4 and Xbox One sound quite similar out of the box. Both consoles promise such features as an ability to power on instantly and quietly update themselves in the background.

Again, though, it's hard to work out what Microsoft's exact plan is with indie games. Sony continues to seek out new and exciting genres that are slowly redefining the PlayStation platforms, and its indie-friendly and developer-focused approach has attracted designers such as Jonathan Blow. Even Nintendo – which itself was one of the slowest of the platform holders to embrace independent development in the industry – is now planning to launch tools aimed at helping mobile developers to bring their software to the Wii U.

WHILE EVERYONE else is knocking down the walls around their garden or at least chipping away at them, the concern is that Microsoft is making the barrier higher. Indie games aren't a sideshow, and it's very unlikely that Microsoft sees it this way – *Minecraft* is one of the biggest videogames there is and has thrived on Xbox Live, while Live Arcade set many of the rules for downloadable releases on current gen consoles. Keeping such developers on side will be key for all three platform holders, though right now, it appears Sony has the head start.

When it comes to hardware, Sony's continued support of Vita and Move will likely have little impact on the sales of the PS4, these are optional extras that can be ignored if the



FABLE ANNIVERSARY EDITION HD REMASTER ANNOUNCED, OUT LATER THIS YEAR ON 360



consumer so wishes. This is not the case with Kinect, given that it has now been completely integrated into the Xbox One experience and Microsoft hopes most of its developers and partners will somehow integrate it into their games. Enhanced responsiveness and micro precision has been promised of the device, but we've heard this before, of course. Microsoft is going to have to work hard to convince gamers that Kinect is relevant to the games they play, and not something shoehorned into the franchises that they love.

AS FOR THE Wii U's status on this new gaming horizon, there are some intimidating questions that must be asked: primarily, how can a console released with last-generation technology stand up to the grunt of two more powerful machines? The answer is the value of its intellectual properties and developers.

It's no secret that despite featuring many qualities demanded by the gaming public – no DRM, support for indies, backwards compatibility – Wii U is struggling, a lack of software being a large contributor towards its seriously flagging sales (the console was even recently outsold by its own predecessor). Recent news such as EA's focus on Xbox One and PS4 isn't helping matters: the Wii U is already lacking in compelling software and as such is failing to build its installed base at the required rate in order to be a sustainable platform for developers.

Nevertheless, there's a lot to be excited about on Wii U, software-wise. There remains high-definition 3D versions of *Mario, Mario Kart, Smash Bros* and *Zelda* to come, alongside Q3 releases such as *Pikmin 3*, which will no doubt be responsible for a bump in sales of hardware.

Above It will be interesting to see how new technology such as the proposed Xbox IllumiRoom enhances the gaming experience, and whether or not it ignites consumer interest.

Furthermore, releases such as *Monster Hunter 3DU, Dragon Quest 10, Shin Megami Tensei X Fire Emblem* are set to cement Nintendo's position in Japan. Alongside this treasure trove of IP, the 3DS continues to be tick along quite nicely towards its goal of eighteen million more 3DS units sold by March 2014. The Wii U still has a lot to prove, however.

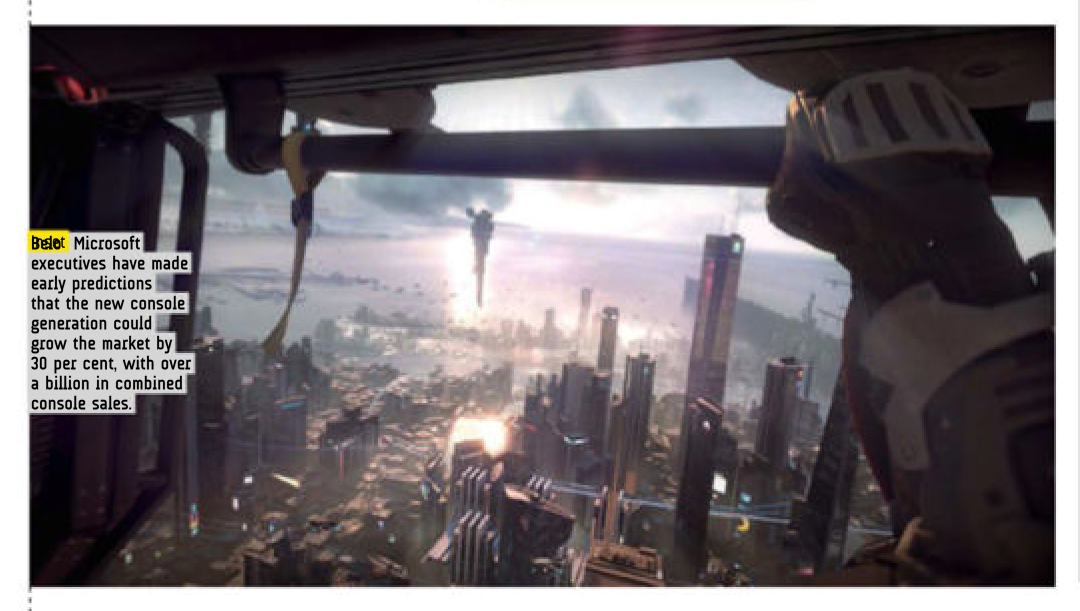
Over the next year, Nintendo will have to fight hard to avoid being overshadowed Xbox One and PS4. Also, while Microsoft and Sony are most likely making plans that span out across the next decade, we wonder whether the Wii U's lifespan will quite manage the same thing. The company has a branding problem on its hands with reaching the mainstream, who may not be clued up on the differences between a Wii and a Wii U – that is the next issue for Nintendo to overcome.

> "All three consoles offer unique experiences that draw us to those platforms. The pursuit should be for great game design"

What we're looking at in the coming months is a head-to-head battle between Sony and Microsoft, with Nintendo tapping into its best-loved licences to capture the attention of audiences. All three manufacturers appear to be fighting different wars, focusing on various strengths to appeal to gamers, and all three are likely to be considered an eventual success if they can pander to their core audiences. The problem many failed consoles have suffered in the past is an identity crisis over what the USPs of a machine actually is. We had no regrets over buying any of the three consoles released last generation, despite their shortcomings, and we're hopeful that we'll end this generation feeling the same.

Focusing on games is the key for all three companies, from now until Christmas. These early moments of a console generation rarely define the years that follow, and even if Microsoft, Nintendo or Sony have marketing strategies that players don't respond to now, all three still offer unique exclusive titles that draw us to those platforms. The pursuit for us should only ever be for great game design.

We can wax lyrical about release dates, pricing, technology partnerships, development architecture, but when it comes down to it, the success of each console will be dictated, as it always has been, by the quality of the software on offer. New technology is certainly exciting, but new experiences always trump it. More immersion, more complex emotions, better storytelling, new interactive experiences – it's the games that explore these features, and the consoles upon which they will appear, that will ultimately declare the winner of the next-generation console war; that is, if there's a clear winner at all.



Below Microsoft executives have made early predictions that the new console generation could grow the market by 30 per cent, with over a billion in combined console sales.

HARMONIX ANNOUNCES DISNEY-THEMED TITLE FANTASIA: MUSIC EVOLVED FOR XBOX ONE AND 360

THE BIG THREE AT A GLANCE

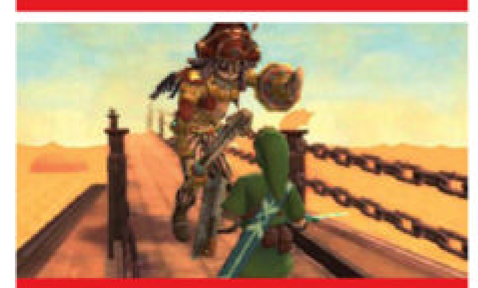


USPs:
- High-definition graphics
- Touch screen GamePad
- Nintendo Network
- Nintendo eShop
- Miiverse
- It's out right now!
- Backwards compatibility

New Super Mario Bros. U
A simple side-scrolling adventure that excellently taps into the whimsical sense of adventure that made the original games so fun, this platformer is a must have in the library of any Wii U owner, particularly those who game with their families.



ZombiU
A smart and rewarding action game, *ZombiU* is one of the few titles in the Wii U's currently unimpressive exclusive line-up that's really worth owning. Although, currently, that's unfortunately not saying a great deal.



HD Zelda
All we know about Link's next exciting adventure is that it's confirmed to be in development, and little else. However, you can be sure that it's this, along with a new *3D Mario* and *Mario Kart*, that is the key to keeping Wii U afloat.

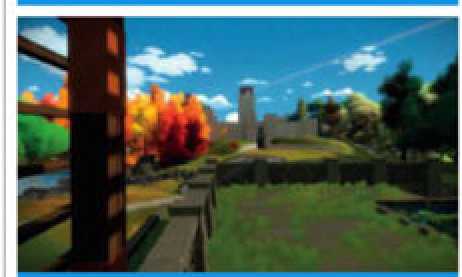


USPs:
- Developer-friendly architecture
- Frictionless gaming
- Dual screen play
- Cloud-based background streaming
- Enhanced social features
- Touch pad controller
- Move

Killzone: Shadow Fall
While the gameplay will no doubt feel a far cry from the freeform antics of *Halo*, there's no denying that Sony's premier shooter is one gorgeous-looking game. At the very least, it's a solid exclusive to support the PS4 launch.



DriveClub
Sony's Evolution Studios has moved on from the knockabout fun of *MotorStorm* to an altogether more serious approach to racing. The team's dedication to absolute graphical realism is impressive, but we're more interested in the deep social features.



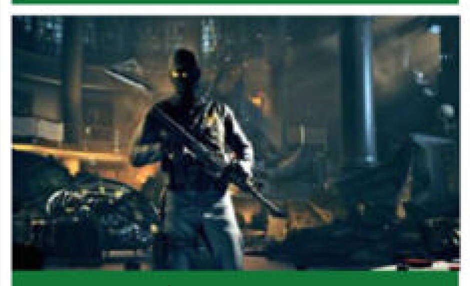
The Witness
Sony has established its firm commitment to the esoteric, indie side of development early on by securing exclusivity to Jonathan Blow's follow-up to *Braid*. Along with the traditional exclusives, this makes for a robust day one line-up.



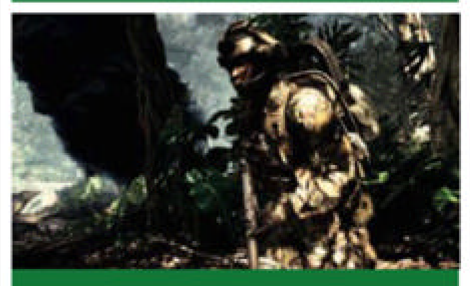
USPs:
- Entertainment hub functionality
- Windows 8 OS
- Voice and gesture control
- Live television
- Kinect
- Skype
- Xbox Live



Forza Motorsport 5
An Xbox launch wouldn't be an Xbox launch without *Forza*. All we've seen so far is a brief trailer that reveals very little indeed, but at this point we more than trust Turn 10 to deliver something that's more than just a pretty car simulator.



Quantum Break
The second of Xbox One's exclusives to have been showcased so far, *Quantum Break* is Remedy Entertainment's follow-up to *Alan Wake*. Looking to blend television and games, let's hope it doesn't take five years to get here.



Call Of Duty: Ghosts
At the time of writing Xbox has no other exclusives to speak of, other than timed exclusivity on DLC for *Ghosts*. Infinity Ward's latest *COD* doesn't look like it's doing anything particularly new, but we're keen to get hands-on time with the multiplayer.



MURDERED: SOUL SUSPECT ANNOUNCED BY SQUARE ENIX, A LIMBO-SET DETECTIVE GAME

(OPINION)

Why Star Wars Will Solve EA's IP Problems

→ With Dead Space and Army Of Two declining in popularity, EA's deal to create core Star Wars titles through BioWare, DICE and Visceral is a perfect match for the publisher, given the property's legacy in interactive entertainment

D*ead Space 3* and *Crysis 3* sales were deemed 'below expectations' during EA's recent revelations about its financial results, and *Medal Of Honor* was quietly killed late last year, following poor sales and reviews of *Warfighter*. While not necessarily justified, a certain amount of buzz has been lost from a number of EA's core intellectual properties. *Battlefield* and *FIFA* continue to see exponential growth, but these other franchises have all run aground in their second and third instalments, either as a result of the games industry's overall contraction in the past few years or simply because the interest in them had faded.

During the same week, EA announced that it had procured the *Star Wars* licence for making core games, and that BioWare, DICE and Visceral would be developing them – this may actually solve the issue of diminishing returns on IP that some of EA's games have seen over the past couple of years. In terms of *Star Wars*' legacy as a licence in videogames, EA's stock of developers are shockingly well-matched to what was formerly LucasArts' primary source of income. If EA invests in *Star Wars* in the same way it has its own IP over the last few years, then the company could be looking at enormous levels of future success.

There's potential in *Star Wars* videogames that hasn't been capitalised on with the past generation, as LucasArts went through four different presidents from 2007 until its recent closure. We know that at least one version of *Star Wars: Battlefront III*, from Free Radical, was getting close to completion – the latest instalment in a series that has so far sold over 10 million copies has been MIA since 2005. Money has probably been left on the table here, and it doesn't really make any sense.

"Every developer dreams of creating games for the *Star Wars* universe," explained EA's Frank Gibeau in a press release announcing the company's deal with Disney. "Three of our top studios will fulfil that dream, crafting epic adventures for *Star Wars* fans. DICE and Visceral will produce new games, joining the BioWare team, which continues to develop for the *Star Wars* franchise. The new experiences we create may borrow from films, but the games will be entirely original, with all-new stories and gameplay."

JUST THINK OF the likely scenarios, then, with Visceral, BioWare and DICE all set to work on this licence. With BioWare undoubtedly making a *Knights Of The Old Republic*-esque action-RPG set within the *Star Wars* universe and DICE most likely to reprise its *Battlefield* template for its own *Star Wars* title – lest we forget, the inspiration behind

Below *The Old Republic* has progressively improved since release.





TAKE TWO CEO SAYS PUBLISHERS SHOULD GET A CUT FROM USED XBOX ONE SALES IF MICROSOFT DOES


Above *The Old Republic* marked the last notable hardcore *Star Wars* title.

Below Hopefully BioWare will revisit its most beloved addition to *Star Wars*.

the massive-selling *Battlefront* series in the first place – there's a huge capacity to impress should EA invest the same level of resources in these *Star Wars* titles as it has with its own IP in recent years. Visceral's own work on *Dead Space* tees them up nicely for something that makes the most of a more familiar sci-fi universe. EA's success will be contingent on quality control, however – this generation has seen the sales decay of poor licensed titles, while the *Arkham* and *Lego* series have shown the opposite trend is possible when critical reception is positive. Invest the money and pick the right licence, and people will come – and there's no better licence than *Star Wars*.

> "Three of our top studios will fulfil that dream, crafting epic adventures for Star Wars fans"
> Frank Gibeau, EA Labels President

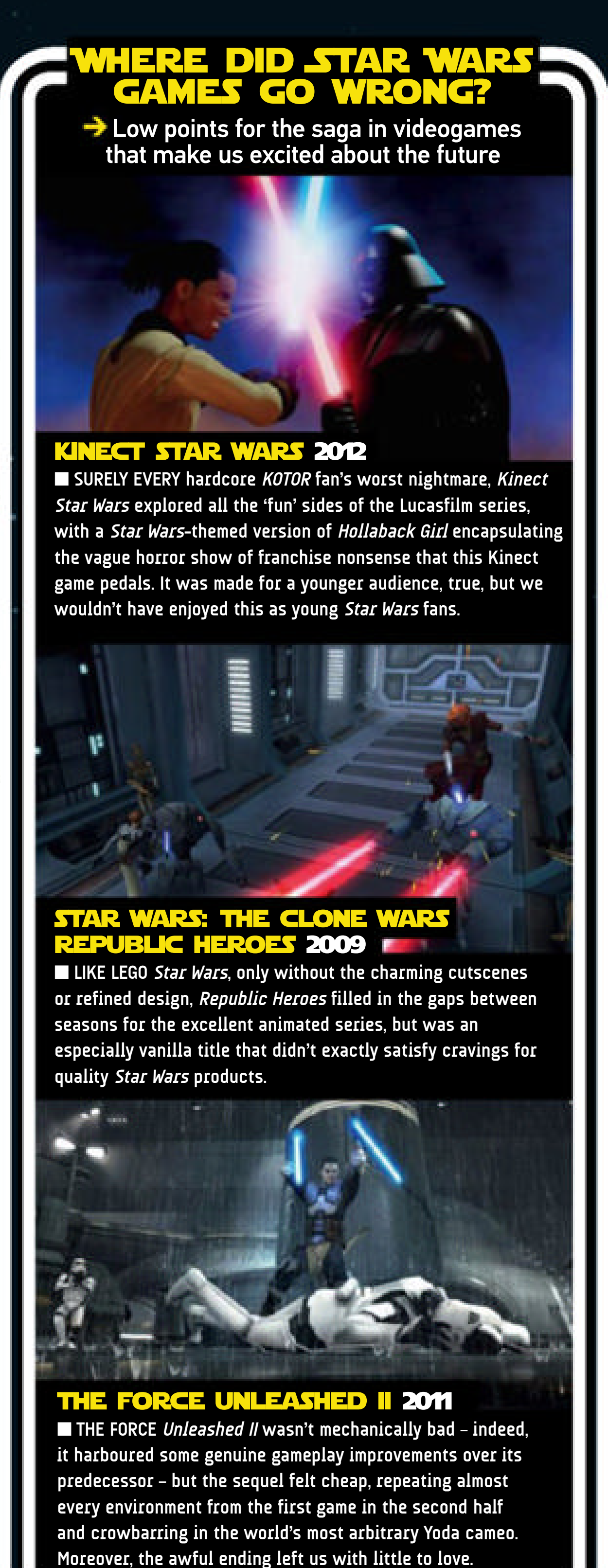
It also has the advantage of a starved marketplace for quality *Star Wars* games, which have been elusive since the mid-Noughties, as well as the colossal commercial boon of JJ Abrams' upcoming Episode VII in 2015, which will likely mark the time we first start seeing EA's games cropping up (the publisher clarified they won't appear before the end of March 2014).

EA's strategy took an interesting turn in May, too, with the announcement that *Medal Of Honor* developers Danger Close would be rechristened DICE Los Angeles. This new studio will be pivotal in the creation of *Star Wars* games, and will be operated in a similarly democratic fashion to DICE's Swedish studio. Indeed, the location it has picked is deliberately near Treyarch and Infinity Ward. "There is an extreme talent pool that we want a part of," DICE GM Karl-Magnus Troedsson told the *Wall Street Journal*.

The licence has landed with a publisher that has an incentive to make this work creatively and commercially, and naming BioWare, DICE and Visceral is nothing short of a declaration of intent in speaking to the market. Whether this deal ultimately yields high-quality *Star Wars* products or not, EA has nothing but potential on its side.

WHERE DID STAR WARS GAMES GO WRONG?

→ Low points for the saga in videogames that make us excited about the future



KINECT STAR WARS 2012

■ SURELY EVERY hardcore *KOTOR* fan's worst nightmare, *Kinect Star Wars* explored all the 'fun' sides of the Lucasfilm series, with a *Star Wars*-themed version of *Hollaback Girl* encapsulating the vague horror show of franchise nonsense that this Kinect game pedals. It was made for a younger audience, true, but we wouldn't have enjoyed this as young *Star Wars* fans.

STAR WARS: THE CLONE WARS REPUBLIC HEROES 2009

■ LIKE LEGO *Star Wars*, only without the charming cutscenes or refined design, *Republic Heroes* filled in the gaps between seasons for the excellent animated series, but was an especially vanilla title that didn't exactly satisfy cravings for quality *Star Wars* products.

THE FORCE UNLEASHED II 2011

■ THE FORCE *Unleashed II* wasn't mechanically bad – indeed, it harboured some genuine gameplay improvements over its predecessor – but the sequel felt cheap, repeating almost every environment from the first game in the second half and crowbarring in the world's most arbitrary Yoda cameo. Moreover, the awful ending left us with little to love.



A SEQUEL TO WELL-RECEIVED PSN TITLE GUACAMELEE IS IN CONSIDERATION, APPARENTLY

EA strikes a deal for Star Wars

→ EA has secured a massive multi-year publishing deal with Disney, signing the exclusive rights to create games in the Star Wars universe, following the collapse of LucasArts earlier in 2013. Recent years haven't been kind to fans of the galaxy far, far away, but with studios like DICE, Visceral Games and BioWare at the helm of these new titles, could this be the boost the franchise needs to reclaim some ground in the videogame industry? We asked the games™ readership to discuss the implications of EA's licence acquisition

I'm well into it. To have the teams behind *Battlefield*, *Dead Space* and *Mass Effect* in their pockets possibly working on stuff. I'd love a new *Battlefront* using the Frostbite 3 engine, imagine that.
Kevin Scully, Facebook

As if a million souls cried out in torment and were silenced at once…
@andrew_furniss, Twitter

The problem with EA is that it has incredibly talented studios working for it. A Boba Fett action game from the makers of *Dead Space* would be cool, as would a team based online game by DICE, but the problem is EA and its horrible business practices. Combined with Disney's tendency to treat games as merchandise, rather than their own entertainment form, I don't think it will turn out great. But I'm fine with being proved wrong. I hope to be.
DifferentClass, games™ forum

I hate EA blah, blah, blah, Money grabbers blah, blah, blah. Never mind that they make ALL of my favourite games.
@AstroMonkey1980, Twitter

Could have been Activision I suppose, but I don't hold much hope for the franchise either way.
@FozzieAl 10m, Twitter

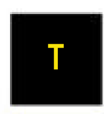
Total double-edged sword. It's a bit like Darth Vader being given the keys to the Millenium Falcon. Trouble with EA, they can be so hit and miss. Its likely that they could create the greatest RPG ever in *Knights Of The Old Republic* for the next-gen… then make it so you could only play when online while only using one server as authentication.
Noozles, games™ forum



(PLAN OF ATTACK)

Creative Assembly: From RTS To Free-To-Play

As Total War: Rome II marches towards a September release, Creative Assembly turns its attention to free-to-play. **games™** sits down with lead game designer James Russell and lead multiplayer designer Gabor Beressy to discuss Total War: Arena



Total War: Arena in many respects is a divergence from the traditional *Total War* template. Can you explain the conceit behind the offshoot?

JAMES RUSSELL: Arena is *made* for multiplayer. It's free-to-play, 10v10 with huge armies where each player has a specific role and controls a squad of three units. Going free-to-play like this really takes multiplayer to the next level, but what's key is gaining a great balance and solid matchmaking, which is only possible with a strong community.

GABOR BERESSY: This is where we're heading into a different direction. We want to offer flexibility; we want players to try different directions, but also keep the major *Total War* pillars and build on them. The items, commander, units and the role you play have to be completely flexible.

JR: We don't want to restrict you to a block of archers.

GB: We don't want to predefine them. We want to focus on the community and build up this game from the base level. We want them to show us how they're using different builds and sets. That's why we chose free-to-play, because we can involve the community more. We can stay in beta and continuously shoot for higher quality.

You've stated that *Arena* stretches outside the confines of the real-time strategy genre. Is *Total War* entering the realm of MMO?

GB: It's an interesting debate to be had – you could say that this is an MMO. It's online, it's massively multiplayer and it's persistent – but then there are MOBA elements. The fact is that MOBA has come to mean a *League Of Legends* clone. But with *Arena* you can play with anyone anywhere in the world, with persistent armies and squads and you're always online.

Will this be set in a specific time period or encompass several?

JR: The ultimate vision for *Arena* is about taking in the whole sweep of history. We are a historical game and we don't want fantasy elements in it, we're about that backbone of historical combat through the ages, we want to pitch commanders from different eras against each other. It's going to be an ongoing product; it's a service that's going to keep going. So we'll start in the ancient world, you know, with Roman commanders and Greeks and so on. We'll move that on and pitch the legendary commanders from different eras against each other.

GB: And, again, I see a really good point here to involve the community. What units would you like, what era and territory? We're always talking about two dimensions; ahead in time or into other territories.

> "The ultimate vision for Arena is about taking in the whole sweep of history"
>
> James Russell, Creative Assembly



Above Creative Assembly's loyal real-time strategy fanbase puts it in a good position to enter the MOBA market.

Above *Total War: Rome II. Arena* will represent another of CA's infrequent attempts to expand the franchise.

What effect will *Arena* have on *Total War* proper; will it have any noticeable effect at all?

JR: The vision is that we'll be producing content for *Arena* that's not dependent on what the next *Total War* title is. *Arena* is a parallel product. We really need to push this message that nothing about the core *Total War* game is under threat. We are absolutely committed to premium big *Total War*. That's why we got into this, because we love those epic experiences, like a campaign that takes days or weeks to play. That's fundamentally suited to single-player; this is about taking multiplayer to the next level. We still want to support that core *Total War* experience in a multiplayer framework, *Rome II* absolutely has multiplayer campaigns, 1v1 and co-op, and up to 4v4.



HALO: SPARTAN ASSAULT COMING TO WINDOWS-BASED DEVICES, DEVELOPED BY 343 INDUSTRIES



Will *Arena* feature a variety of different game modes?

JR: We're going to have a small number of maps in the first instance but one game mode. They're going to be tightly designed, very focused gameplay that's pretty much linked with how the maps are designed.

How many unit types would you be happy with?

JR: A lot. It's worth emphasising that because we want to have this really compelling meta-game, we want the player to be upgrading their units. We're almost breaking down the boundaries of what a unit is; you can take a particular type of spearman, equip him with a different spear or shield, you'll be able to upgrade items, that's what you need to do in a game like this. If you include those as different units, obviously it's an incredible array. But even without that we still want a very significant amount of units.

Has the concurrent development of *Total War: Rome II* fed into *Arena*'s design at all?

JR: We may share some stuff with what's gone before – animations, and so on. But as we go forward we'll be making content that's absolutely just for *Arena*. If in the end we have samurai in *Arena*, some samurai units and a samurai commander, we're going to build them for it, because the *Rome II* engine is a new engine. We're not going to grab stuff that's gone before; we're going to be building stuff for the future. And Arena will have its own production line, its own content.

CREATIVE ASSEMBLY'S ALIEN

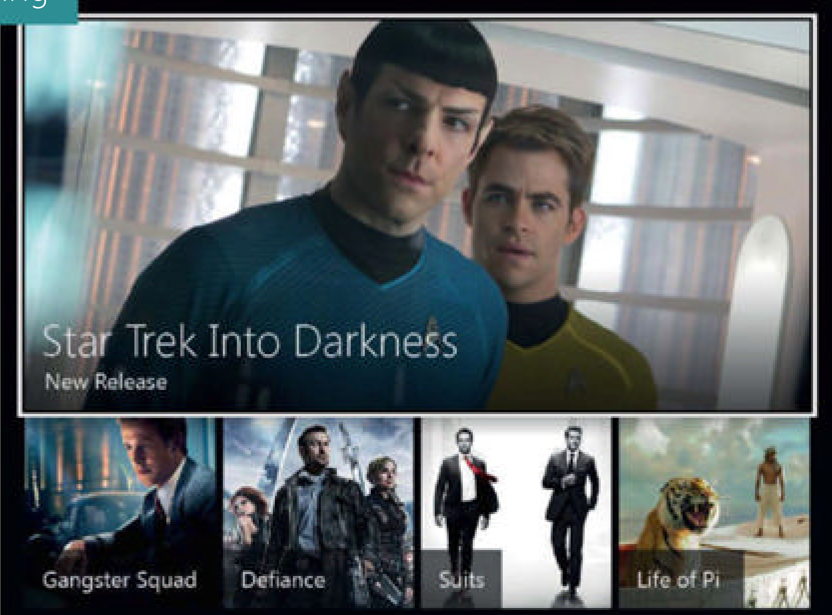
The studio takes on survival horror with its future movie adaptation

ALIENS: COLONIAL MARINES left Sega reeling with a rather sour user response, but the publisher is backing another adaptation of the extra-terrestrial licence. Creative Assembly is at the helm for a claustrophobic survival-horror take is based chiefly on Ridley Scott's original *Jaws*-in-space classic. The few nuggets of information to crawl out of Sega suggests that the story will be set on the Nostromo, featuring a lone Xenomorph stalking the residents of the ill-fated vessel. It's also been suggested that the unusually protracted development period is due to a next-generation release switcheroo. It remains to be seen whether Creative Assembly has the talent to transform the tarnished licence into a genuine videogame event.

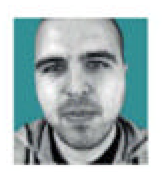


ARKANE STUDIOS, CREATOR OF DISHONORED, IS NOW APPARENTLY MAKING THE LONG-AWAITED PREY 2

#TRENDING
with NowGamer.com's Ryan King



Microsoft's fail = Nintendo's gain?



I've never been a big Nintendo fan. It is entirely my mum's fault. I remember playing *Duck Tales* round my friend Dan's house after school (or rather watching him play it – he refused to let me have a go, the bastard) and I did what any seven-year-old would do. As soon as I got home, I asked my mum if I could have a NES for my birthday. "You're not getting a Nintendo. Nintendo's rubbish!" was the unusually stern reply. That birthday, I got a Master System. And that was that. I didn't think to question what my mum said until I was older and by that point, I had blue blood running through my veins. Sega fan for life.

A lot has changed since then. Sega has crashed out of the hardware market and console gaming itself is unrecognisable from those hazy *Duck Tales* days – gamertags, achievements, trophies, patches, DLC, multimedia convergence, online passes, season passes, Collector's Special Limited Editions, pre-order bonuses, play this awful free app on your phone to unlock this poxy gun for multiplayer and so on. Nintendo has received criticism over the years for not keeping up with the games industry trends. There's ongoing debate over whether Wii U is truly next-gen or not – an argument of semantics, perhaps, but that it's even up for debate is significant.

But how appealing Nintendo's old-fashioned ways suddenly seem in light of Microsoft's worrying view of the future. Microsoft's next console, Xbox One, was introduced to the world not with a whimper or a bang but with TV. A lot of TV. You can switch to TV while playing games. Then you can switch from games back to TV! Browse the internet while watching TV. Then there was something about games – 15 exclusives in the first year! – before Microsoft hurried back to talking about TV, getting Steven Spielberg on vidlink to talk about *Halo*! *Halo* the TV series, that is.

The games themselves? *FIFA*, *Madden*, *Forza*, *Call Of Duty*. You literally could not pick four more predictable games than that to have showed up. Original IP *Quantum Break* was a glimmer of hope – a Remedy game that blends TV and gaming – but this was bungled by Microsoft, who didn't clearly communicate its potential during the presentation.

What followed the conference was worse, as Microsoft gave conflicting answers to Xbox One questions. You don't need an internet connection to play on Xbox One but you do need to be connected to the internet. We won't stop you from playing second-hand games if you pay a fee, no wait you don't *have* to pay a fee, actually wait yes you *do* have to pay a free. Microsoft's high-level execs seemed to be reading from different scripts. It was a disaster.

> How appealing Nintendo's old-fashioned ways seem in light of Microsoft's worrying view of the future

There were some who clung to the 'Wait until E3!' mantra as though it's the only lifeboat left in a growing storm of criticism but that's missing the point. If Microsoft is pushing games forward in a way that's set to excite or innovate or even merely interest, we didn't see how. What we saw was Microsoft's enthusiasm for TV, Skype, internet browsers and other peripheral activities that exist outside of the core activity of, you know, playing gamers. Kinect 2.0 looks like it has promise but how will it deliver? How will it change or enhance gaming? Without any examples at the conference, all we can do is look at how Microsoft used Kinect previously and that's a history littered with disappointment.

This is why Nintendo's simplicity and old-fashioned ways, held against the company as a weakness, suddenly seems like a strength. Nintendo is a company that will never get distracted chasing the pot of gold at the end of a multimedia rainbow and whether that's because it doesn't want to or wouldn't know where to begin doesn't even matter. Iwata's Nintendo Directs might not serve the same purpose as Microsoft's Xbox One reveal but you don't have to fight through various layers of corporate hyperbole and marketing lingo to know that they feel inclusive, charming and aimed at you rather than shareholders. The message from Nintendo is clear – they're about games. Somehow, that's been lost in Microsoft's ambition to be all things to all people.

Sony is the X factor in all this, of course. Now Microsoft has taken the first hits for pre-owned activation fees and having to be connected online, Sony could walk down the same path while incurring less anger. Sony could also go the other way and earn plaudits. We'll have to wait and see. But if first impressions hold true, then the anger and confusion resulting from Microsoft's conference shows it has alienated a large core of its audience and in light of that, Nintendo's core values of games and simplicity seem a lot more appealing.

There's been a lot of talk about how next-gen is a battle for your living room, about technological convergence, about how the competition is now Apple and Google rather than Sony and Nintendo. I couldn't care less about any of that. I have a smart TV. I have a smartphone. I have an iPad. All I want is to play games and I'll always have a place for the company who gives me the best games with the least amount of bullshit to play them.

Ryan King is editor of





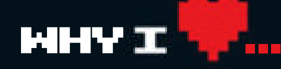
The Wolf Among Us

→ The Walking Dead developer tackles the Fables comic book series

It's been a year since *The Walking Dead* videogame adaptation first shuffled its way to critical and commercial acclaim and now Telltale Games has pulled back the curtain on its next evocative point-and-click adventure. An adaptation of Bill Willingham's *Fables* comic book series, *The Wolf Among Us* is set within a secret New York City community populated by fairytale characters evading the attention of humans. Players assume the role of Bigby Wolf, the local sheriff who battles his inner wolf as he attempts to protect those around him. His plight raises obvious parallels to *The Walking Dead*'s Lee Everett, but where *The Wolf Among Us* differs from Telltale's adaptation of Robert Kirkman's zombie-infested survival series is through the binary decisions that encompassed that tale. Expanded upon significantly, choices have a greater sense of narrative consequence and while it acts as a prequel to the comic, the story is far from linear. Suffice to say, we'll be sinking our teeth into this when it arrives at the end of the year.

"You will question your own prowess as a player.
You are now at your lowest, and only now are you truly ready for Dark Souls to rebuild you"

MATT CHARLESWORTH, VALVE



Dark Souls

MATT CHARLESWORTH, VALVE (@ZZZCHARLESWORTH)

"Just look at it. Soak it in. And then prepare to die. For the first few hours you could be forgiven for not *getting Dark Souls*. You will die, a lot. You'll ask yourself what all the fuss is about and you'll be unable to answer your maladroit self. First you will question the people who champion it, then your own prowess as a player. You are now at your lowest, and only now are you truly ready for *Dark Souls* to rebuild you. And rebuild you it will: stronger and more agile. Then you will learn an important life lesson, that perseverance and commitment rarely go unrewarded. *Dark Souls* changed the way I look at every other game and in a way it ruined them in the process, just by being so... incredibly good."



NO MULTIPLAYER?

THERE'S SOMETHING REFRESHING about *The New Order*'s complete lack of a multiplayer option, as MachineGames has exclusively focused its energies on the campaign mode in this title. Considering the rushed-feeling multiplayer options given in *The Darkness*, we're not too surprised; indeed, Starbreeze's strength was typically in one-player story modes, and it's pleasing to see that DNA find its way into *The New Order*. Intriguingly, Bethesda seems like it only incorporates multiplayer if it really makes sense, rather than seeing it as a market-driven box to tick. *The Evil Within* and *Dishonored* are much the same deal – worthy single-player experiences are still something people will pay £40 for.

The world has more depth to it than previous *Wolfenstein* titles; there's a real sense of rebellion as you conspire to bring the Nazis down.

We've played this bit. Trust us, it doesn't end well for your driver friend, here, who doesn't have much of a plan when it comes to his demise.



The red-glowing mechs are definitely reminiscent of *Battlestar Galactica*'s Cylons.

Wolfenstein: The New Order

CONCEPT ■ Set in an alternative Sixties where the Nazis won World War II after getting their hands on some nefarious technology, you lead a rebellion with many firearms to bring the regime down.

INFORMATION

Details

Format: PS4/Xbox One/PS3/360/PC
Origin: Sweden
Publisher: Bethesda
Developer: MachineGames
Release: 2013
Players: 1

Developer Profile

Jens Matthies is the creative director of *The New Order*, having worked as the art director on various titles at Starbreeze for many years. It feels like those mature narrative sensibilities have crossed over with them into *Wolfenstein*, even if it's a litlte heavy on shooting right now.

Developer History

The Chronicles Of Riddick: Escape From Butcher Bay
2004 [Multi]

The Darkness
2007 [Multi]

The Chronicles Of Riddick: Assault On Dark Athena
2009 [Multi]

High Point

The Darkness remains one of the generation's strongest shooters, combining strategic powers with incredible storytelling, elevating the worth of its Nineties comic book source material.



Let's kill Hitler

W*olfenstein* has been on hiatus since *Return To Castle Wolfenstein* in 2001, as far as we're concerned. After the dire 2009 entry used the series' legacy as shorthand for Nazi-supernatural nonsense, a more narrative-centric homage has emerged in the form of *The New Order*, a cross-gen shooter from some of the smartest minds behind Starbreeze's *Riddick* games and *The Darkness*. It's naturally a great fit – the combat is challenging and satisfying, but the way the story of *Wolfenstein* will be delivered easily has the most potential of anything we've seen so far in the game.

Set in the Sixties, where the Nazis have won World War II thanks to some oddly advanced technology, players take on the role BJ Blazkowicz in a campaign that sees him organising a resistance movement against the world-occupying force. *The New Order* is campaign-only, a smart move given Starbreeze's legacy in creating primarily character-driven games; indeed, MachineGames is keen to point out that *Wolfenstein* is meant to be more of an adventure shooter rather than a straightforward FPS, which it then demonstrates to us by diving into a scenario that is entirely devoid of combat.

/// We're watching Blazkowicz on a train, where a Nazi officer called Engel is travelling alongside her Aryan boytoy, Bubi, protected by a Geth-via-Cylon giant mech with a head-mounted red light. She challenges Blazkowicz on his loyalties to the regime by asking him to pick through a series of pictures, over which ones make him feel disgusted and so on, with the expressed threat that she'll kill you if you reach for the gun. You get to interact with the scenario, pointing at the pictures as she lays them out – after a few rounds of this, she picks the gun back up and points it right at you, only to throw the pictures to one side and declare it a test. It's not dissimilar to the Hans Lander milk scene in *Inglourious Basterds*, or indeed, the Fassbender/German speaking scene that ends in a firefight from the same movie.

With a focus on these kind of scenarios, we feel like *Wolfenstein* will capture our imaginations; the shooting doesn't quite enchant in the same way so far. Not due to any weaknesses – indeed, it's great, fast fun and unashamedly challenging, basically requiring you to approach it as a cover shooter, making use of a well-implemented lean command and demanding strategic use of the environment. It's just maybe a little too familiar, and doesn't seem to build too much on any existing FPS formulae from what we can see, which takes a little of the excitement out of the extraordinary effort to bring this world to life artistically.

Yet it's absolutely entertaining, a lot quicker than *Riddick* or *The Darkness* and an effective homage to the original *Wolfenstein* without being regressive. The weapons are imaginative, with two variously-powered laser projectile tools able to burn through certain parts of the environment (and enemies), as well as alternate fire modes that reward experimentation.

> "Working on this game is an honour, and our team is driven to create an unforgettable experience"
> JENS MATTHIES MACHINEGAMES

Wolfenstein: The New Order is built on id Tech 5, too, which was crafted to be scaleable across generations of platforms – and as such, is also the basis behind Bethesda's other cross-gen title, *The Evil Within* – meaning that in its current-gen form, *Wolfenstein* is basically in the ballpark of *Rage*'s visual quality on those systems, while the Xbox One and PS4 versions will be in line with the jaw-dropping high-end PC iteration of *Rage*. A smart move, really, and nothing we've seen of the game so far looks outside of your existing consoles' capabilities. It runs fast and looks sharp.

Oh, and one final thing – MachineGames was coy on whether Hitler would make an appearance in *The New Order*. We'll take that as a yes, while wondering what kind of visually bizarre boss scenario the designers will think up, given the series' legacy in this regard. *Wolfenstein* is hopefully in the right hands.

Even though Rocksteady has stepped back from *Origins*, the game will still handle in a similar way to *Arkham Asylum* and *City*. The free-flow combat returns, but Batman will find new challenge in an expanded rogues gallery on the streets of Gotham.

INTRODUCING BLACK MASK

BEHIND THE mask of *Origins*' leading villain is Roman Sionis, childhood friend of Bruce Wayne. Roman grew up in the shadow of his parents and their desperate attempts to move up Gotham's social ladder, often at the expense of his own safety and happiness. After reaching breaking point, burning down the family home and murdering his parents, Roman became the head of Janus Cosmetics. A few bad business decisions and one night in a graveyard led him to carve a mask out of his father's coffin, donning the mantle of Black Mask.

Above: Gotham City is being expanded, giving players a whole new playground to explore. Old Gotham will be familiar to those who played *Arkham City*, while New Gotham is a metropolis area filled with larger buildings just begging to be climbed and jumped off of. Right: With *Origins* coming at the end of October, there's still no word on whether it will make the jump to next-generation systems. We hope it does, however.





Batman: Arkham Origins

CONCEPT ■ Warner Bros. Games Montreal take the reins on a new chapter of the Dark Knight's legacy. What is original developer Rocksteady working on, then? We can only speculate.

The legends of the Dark Knight need to start somewhere

Following in the footsteps of Frank Miller and David Mazzucchelli's seminal *Year One* series, Warner Bros. Games Montreal is taking us back to the early days of the Dark Knight's career, before he became the force of nature we recognise from Rocksteady's games.

Before the likes of The Joker and Ra's al Ghul started haunting Bruce Wayne's evenings, the Caped Crusader honed his skills on the regular scum of Gotham City. He's faster and stronger than the average goon wielding a knife, but he's not the veteran superhero we've become so intimately acquainted with. *Origins* will show us Batman's greatest challenge since he donned the cowl, then, as Black Mask (see left) makes a move to reclaim the streets for his own. One snowy Christmas eve, the sadistic mob boss hires eight of the DCU's deadliest assassins to take down the Dark Knight once and for all, the hunter becoming the hunted.

While Deathstroke is the only confirmed assassin, *Origins* will surely dip into DC's vast pool of characters to give Batman a night to remember. We expect to see Deadshot, Joker and perhaps even the Talon and the Court of Owls make appearances as Black Mask strives for the Bat's head for Christmas.

Against all expectation, Rocksteady ushered in a new era for licensed games with the *Arkham* series. *Asylum* introduced gamers to a flowing melee combat system that revelled in broken bones, while *City* later refined the core concepts and detective mechanics in a wonderful open world setting. It's no surprise then, that the unveiling of *Origins* was met with trepidation as it was discovered the studio would be stepping back from this instalment, instead continuing to work on an announced project. Though the series seems to be in capable hands; Warner Bros. Montreal cut its teeth on the Wii U port of *Arkham City*, giving the studio ample time to get familiar with Rocksteady's assets and modified engine.

> "Play as a younger Batman within a fresh storyline and expanded world"
>
> REID SCHNEIDER VICE PRESIDENT, WB GAMES MONTREAL

/// Warner Bros. Montreal is adopting the 'If it ain't broke, don't fix it' mentality as it approaches *Origins*, repurposing the combat system from City and introducing tougher enemy types and new gadgets into the flow to bring renewed challenges to seasoned players. One such gadget is the Remote Claw, which will let Batman target two enemies at once and pull them together for dynamic takedowns.

These new gadgets will come in handy when traversing the expanded Gotham City. Set years before *Asylum*, the city is split into Old and New Gotham – Old Gotham is the area that will later become the city-spanning prison, though it has not yet been walled off or ravaged by floods. New Gotham will offer a completely new area for players to explore, effectively doubling the playable space found in *Arkham City*, a metropolitan area filled with towering skyscrapers and higher GCPD presence. Thankfully if you don't feel like gliding and grappling your way across the zones, Warner Bros. Montreal is introducing fast travel into *Origins* via the Batwing.

In expanding the world, the Montreal studio is also expanding elements of the Dark Knight's career that were perhaps overlooked in previous iterations. *Origins* will feature a renewed emphasis on Wayne's detective skills, with much of the game framed around Batman trying to solve a double homicide. Players will be able to return to the crime scene throughout the game once new information and evidence has been discovered in the city. The Batcave can even replicate the scene, letting the player view the murder from different angles and in slow motion to try and discover clues they may have missed the first time around.

When a new studio picks up a beloved franchise, it can be tough to give it a chance before rushing to judgement, but *Origins* seems to be a positive step forward for the *Arkham* series. Warner Bros. Games Montreal is aware of what made the series so popular to begin with, and with Rocksteady only offering technical assistance throughout development, the studio has the chance to leave its own mark on Gotham City.

INFORMATION

Details

Format: Multi
Origin: Canada
Publisher: Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment
Developer: Warner Bros. Games Montreal
Release: 25 October 2013
Players: 1

Developer Profile

Formed in 2010 with Ubisoft's VP of communications Martin Carrier at the helm, Waner Bros. Games Montreal found its footing working on licensed titles, before being handed the keys to Rocksteady's *Arkham* universe. It's a big step up for the developer, but with a team of some ex-Eidos, Ubisoft and EA staff, we would hope Batman is in safe hands.

Developer History

Looney Tunes: Scooby Doo! Cartoon Universe **2012 [PC]**

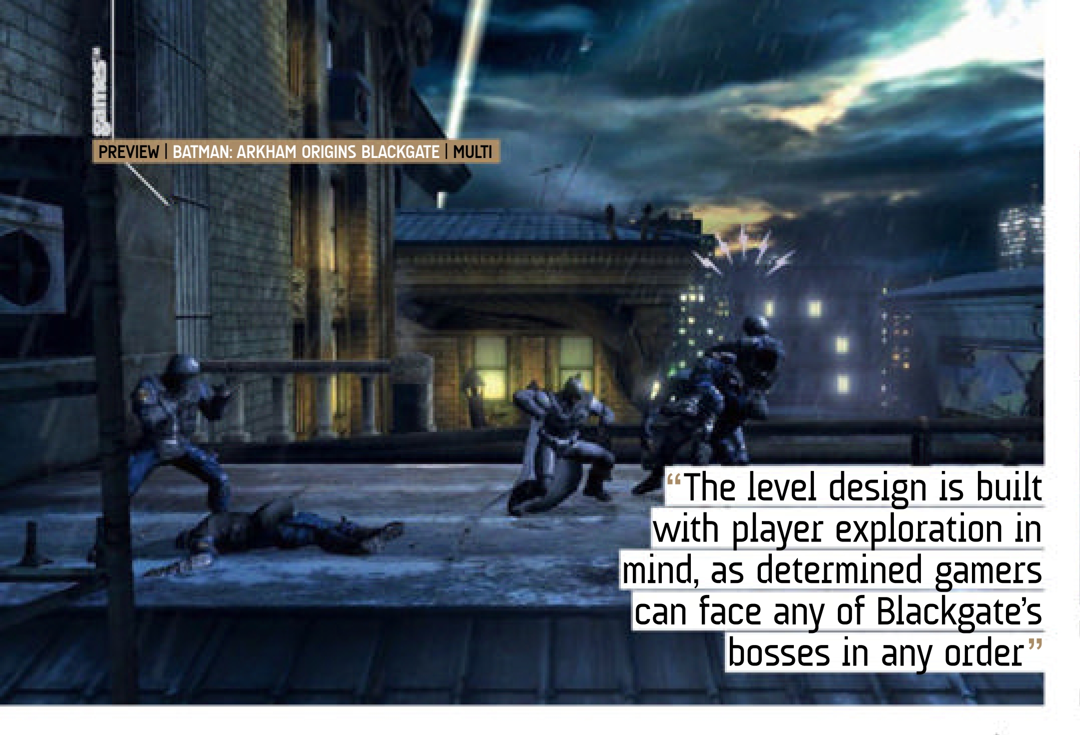
Batman: Arkham City Armoured Edition **2012 [Wii U]**

High Point

When Nintendo needed third-party support for the Wii U, Warner Bros. Games Montreal released the best version of *Arkham City*.



■ Above: Bruce Wayne will have to go up against some of the DCU's most powerful villains as eight assassins descend on Gotham. Left: Warner Bros. Games Montreal is reusing Rocksteady's assets and engine to create a title that feels as much like the other games in the *Arkham* franchise as possible.



"The level design is built with player exploration in mind, as determined gamers can face any of Blackgate's bosses in any order"



Above: Armature is working with Warner Bros. Montreal to prevent spoilers if you pick the handheld game up before the console iteration.

Batman: Arkham Origins Blackgate

CONCEPT ■ Ex-*Metroid Prime* developer tackles the Dark Knight in an all new 2.5D Metroidvania adventure.

Batman's Arkham adventures make the jump to handhelds

While there has been plenty of hype surrounding *Batman: Arkham Origins*, this October is bringing another game into the Arkham series continuity. *Batman: Arkham Origins Blackgate* is coming to handheld consoles as an accompaniment to Warner Bros. Games Montreal's *Arkham Origins*. Between the two titles, players will finally see the Dark Knight rise from costumed vigilante to the superhero we know him to be by the time the opening credits of *Arkham Asylum* start to roll.

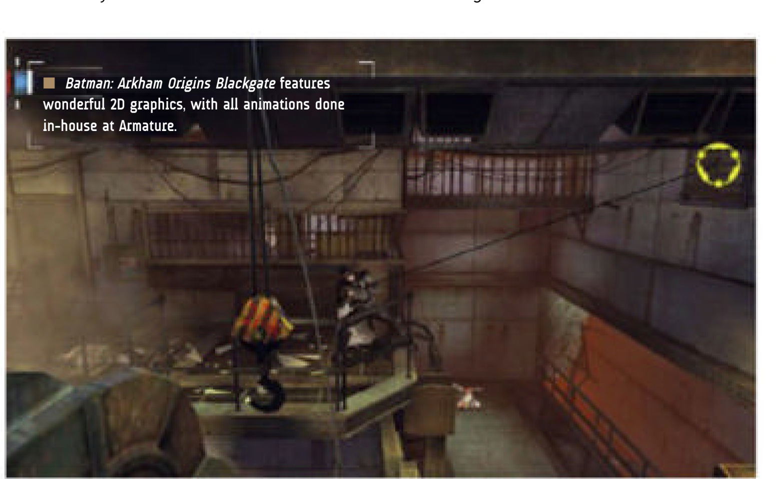
Developed by Armature Studios, *Origins Blackgate* is a 2.5D 'Metroidvania' game that sends Batman deep into the infamous Blackgate Penitentiary, the home of the general population, as an uprising threatens to bring the prison down from the inside. The format echoes the opening sections of *Arkham Asylum*, with the Dark Knight called in to neutralise a greater threat before it spirals out into the streets of Gotham.

Armature's biggest challenge, of course, is bringing the fluidity and feeling of the Arkham games to the smaller PS Vita and right-analogue-stickless 3DS systems. The Arkham games have typically relied on pinpoint control and accuracy for the free-flow combat system, so when approaching *Origins Blackgate*, the studio has had to completely redesign the way Batman handles in a fight. He will still move from left to right of course, but he will also be able to jump between the foreground and background, adding a new layer of depth and tactics to the side-scroller.

The familiar elements of the Arkham games will all make a return. Batman can still utilise grappling, gliding and climbing within the 2D space. The level design is built with player exploration in mind, as determined gamers can face any of *Blackgate*'s bosses in any order, and at any time. Detective mode also makes an appearance, letting the caped crusader move to vantage points and use silent takedowns. It even grants Batman the ability to see enemy sightlines to better break some bones.

Armature is working within the genre it knows best – it might not be a household name just yet, but the studio is headed up by ex-Retro employees Mark Pacini, Todd Keller and Jack Mathews, who all helped create the *Metroid Prime* games at Nintendo. Their former studio revolutionised the gear-collecting exploration genre, and they are hoping to do it again with *Blackgate Origins*. Batman moves through the world just as Samus did in her side-scrolling days, splitting time between fighting enemies, acquiring gear and exploring the many corridors and passages of the game world.

As long as *Blackgate Origins* can stay true to the Metroidvania formula, while still implementing the various tonal elements of the Batman universe, then Armature should have a fantastic debut title on its hands.



■ *Batman: Arkham Origins Blackgate* features wonderful 2D graphics, with all animations done in-house at Armature.

INFORMATION

Details

Format: PS Vita, 3DS
Origin: USA
Publisher: Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment
Developer: Armature Studio
Release: 25 October
Players: 1

Developer Profile

Formed in 2008 by Mark Pacini, Todd Keller and Jack Mathews, Armature is a new studio that has only put its name to the HD collection of *Metal Gear Solid* – which it co-developed with Bluepoint. Armature has the pedigree to create a fantastic game, with many of the staff responsible for Nintendo's reinvention of *Metroid*. *Origins Blackgate* is a big deal for such a new studio, so all eyes will be on this from start to finish.

Developer History

Metal Gear Solid HD Collection **2012 [PS Vita]**

High Point

The trio that created Armature was responsible for the *Metroid Prime* games on GameCube and Wii, each holding a lead position on the team at Retro Studios. The *Metroid* trilogy is a highlight of any career, not to mention a highlight of the previous generation.

"The Fall contains the necessary Deus Ex DNA to be a convincing follow-up"

■ Ben Saxon looks rather like a younger Jean Reno. The voice acting overdoes it a little bit, compared to the previous game, but it's a nonetheless impressive touch for an iOS release. Let's hope the story is as intriguing.

Deus Ex: The Fall

CONCEPT ■ Taking place around the time of *Deus Ex: Human Revolution* with some overlap in terms of characters, this Square Enix mobile title takes the complex ideas of the series and attempts to bring them to portable devices.

On iPad? Really? You never asked for this. But you may yet be impressed…

A true sequel to *Deus Ex* on mobile platforms is probably the last thing fans of the series would ask for from the fantastically complex shooter/RPG series. *The Fall* is no Adam Jensen-starring endless runner, however – it's a new instalment created in conjunction with Eidos Montreal, built in *Human Revolution*'s image, carrying across the aspirations of rich environments, choice-based story options and freeform approaches to level design.

The effort is quite extraordinary for a handheld title – and we do mean that in the best possible way – and for a low price, we could see it acting as quite a nice stopgap between console instalments. Taking place concurrently with the last game's story in 2027, you play as Ben Saxon, co-star of spin-off book *The Icarus Effect* and a former Tyrant, *Human Revolution*'s primary antagonists. He becomes embroiled in a conspiracy involving the shortage of fictional drug Neuropozyne, brought to life by the writers and voice actors behind the previous *Deus Ex* title.

The cutscenes aren't quite as sharp, but everything else is in place: objects glow in the environment when you want to select them, augmentations progress in the same way and the hacking puzzles were almost born to be on a touchscreen. You control the game using virtual sticks on the iPad, rarely an ideal FPS interface, but there are on-screen shortcuts to make the process easier when it comes to switching between bits of cover. It takes a little time to get used to, but there's a fluidity and ease to *The Fall* from what we've played, and exploring features like weapons customisation relay how much of the depth of the series has carried over.

The environments, so richly realised in *Human Revolution*, are almost exactly as impressive here, taking us to new hub locations like Costa Rica that have their own specific visual touches. While we're not expecting the same amount to do within each one, sub-quests are available, and there are parts of the world that you may never venture into. Like any *Deus Ex* game, these hubs reward exploration, while the same decisions of stealth and action face you during each combat encounter. Expect around five hours of gameplay in the main campaign. In-game purchases can boost your abilities faster, yet Square Enix says that the game can easily be completed without them, with Praxis points obtained in much the same way as before. There's also a New Game Plus option, for those desiring an extra challenge.

Everything that *Human Revolution* brought to *Deus Ex* is here – it's incredibly impressive as a technical achievement, even in the way it carries the rich black and gold colour palette through every environment. Technically, then, *The Fall* contains the necessary *Deus Ex* DNA to be a convincing follow-up for those who have waited almost two years for a proper *Human Revolution* sequel, and whose appetites for the series may not be sated by that rather brilliant YouTube video of Adam Jensen doing the safety dance. The crucial touchstone it now needs to hit is storytelling-based. If the script and voice-acting are up to scratch, *The Fall* could set an interesting precedent for the format of sequels to hardcore-centric games.



■ The rooms are clearly built in *Human Revolution*'s image, which is naturally very impressive on handheld technology. Shame there's no Vita version, huh?

INFORMATION

Details

Format: iOS
Origin: UK
Publisher: Square Enix
Developer: In-house
Release: Summer 2013
Players: 1

Developer Profile

Square Enix Mobile is a key part of its modern strategy. There's a separation between the publisher's east and west-focused mobile output, however, with its UK mobile division focusing on titles like *The Fall* and *Mini Ninjas* while Japan handles projects like the iOS port of *The World Ends With You.*

Developer History

KooZac **2012 [iOS]**
Chaos Rings **2012 [iOS]**
The Worlds Ends With You **2012 [iOS]**
Mini Ninjas **2013 [iOS]**

High Point

The Worlds Ends With You deserved a bigger audience than it got on 3DS, and this recent, slightly-overpriced port brought the game to a platform where it had something of a second coming.

The Bureau: XCOM Declassified

CONCEPT ■ *The Bureau* takes the long standing tenets of the *XCOM* franchise and attempts to transfer them to something more personal and action based.

2K's controversial XCOM instalment finally reveals itself

The Bureau: XCOM Declassified didn't have the best entry into public consciousness. So vociferous and heated was the fan reaction when a shooter based on *XCOM* was announced that 2K Marin went back to the drawing board and had a good long hard think about what it wanted to convey in the *XCOM* universe. *The Bureau* consequently feels like a good compromise of the intent as well as what fans expect from an *XCOM* game. In an age where bellyaching and whining has blighted the sales potential of many a perfectly fine game (*DmC* being one example and more contentiously, the underrated *Syndicate* being another) it's maybe wise that *The Bureau: XCOM Declassified* liberally takes more from the preceding games than anyone thought it would, for the developer's sake at least.

Plot-wise, it's set back in the good old Sixties, so it's chronologically the first in the series, taking place right at the start of an alien invasion of Earth. America is the focal point, as the developer is more interested in telling a more localised, personal story this time around, rather than have a planetary-wide struggle as seen in previous games. Your character is William Carter: an agent with a gruff voice, *Ghostbusters*-style backpack, and a sweet hat that never falls off no matter how wildly you roll around like a moron. Carter's at the forefront of the fight back against the alien menace, working as he does for the newly formed *XCOM*. The mission played saw him jet off to New Mexico where he sees first-hand the devastation wrought by these less than pleasant visitors upon the innocent locals and the nearby terrain, as terraforming technology is set down.

It's hard not to think of *Mass Effect*, or even *Alpha Protocol* when playing through *The Bureau*. It's no longer a first-person shooter, as was first revealed. It's metamorphosed into a third-person shooter, albeit one with (and some fans can breathe a sigh of relief here) a heavy focus on tactics and positioning, with a minimum of running and gunning. There's a hub centre where you take your missions, giant alien monoliths loom ominously in the background while alien crafts whizz past, and even the special skill wheel that pops up during gameplay bears more than a little resemblance to the one Shepard uses to force Garrus and his compadres to charge at and attack the Reaper menace. After some exposition you're placed in the heat of battle, you and two other agents engaging the alien menace. And if your teammates die, by the way, that's it. They're gone. There's no coming back, no miraculous comic book style resurrection. You got them killed and you'll have to live with the consequences.

/// *The Bureau* will gleefully tear you and your squad to shreds if you play like a lunkhead raised on a diet of Chuck Norris films and raw meat. If you position them badly, don't constantly place them behind cover and accidentally expose them you're in for trouble. Even from an initial play through the demo stage, it feels a lot more methodical and punishing than other shooters. This is not a game to be rushed. Despite appearing somewhat unremarkable at first glance, there is depth here and an incentive to play carefully. It also successfully conveys a sense of dread and creepiness. The locals have become mindless husks, and slowly wandering through them as they moan and shamble whilst picking up diary entries of their last few days is gratifyingly morbid, and more than a little befitting of an apocalyptic alien invasion.

> "Our team are our own worst critics, as far as living up to the XCOM franchise is concerned"
> ALYSSA FINLEY 2K MARIN

The Bureau: XCOM Declassified, has perhaps done enough to silence entitled naysayers, and is far more cerebral than first glances perhaps reveal. Though it may not set the world on fire, nor be particularly original, it juggles with a number of different genres fairly successfully, and looks like one to watch come August.

INFORMATION

Details

Format: PC/PS3/Xbox 360
Origin: United States/ Australia
Publisher: 2K Games
Developer: 2K Marin
Release: 20 August 2013
Players: 1

Developer Profile

2K Marin came into existence when it spun off from Irrational Games after the development of the original *BioShock*. The Australian part joined up with 2K Marin once *XCOM* was announced in 2010. It's continued to help out on Irrational products since, such as *BioShock Infinite*.

Developer History

BioShock: **2008**
BioShock 2: **2010**
BioShock Infinite: **2013**

High Point

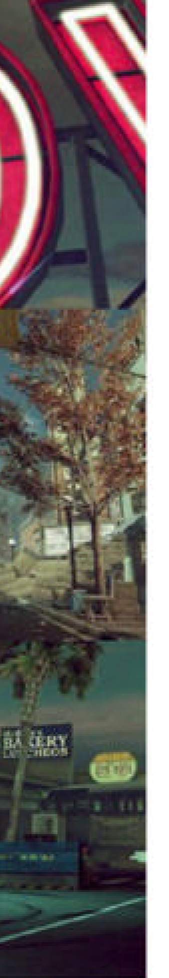
BioShock 2, which was arguably a better 'game' than its predecessor, though it certainly lacked the impact of the original. Nevertheless, taken as a self-contained piece it was a great experience.





■ Above: The Sectoids make a welcome return to the latest *XCOM*, complete with Fifties sci-fi B-movie aesthetic.





MASSIVELY EFFECTIVE

IN ADDITION to the action gameplay being reminiscent of *Mass Effect*, Carter will be able to speak to other characters throughout the game. You get to choose the nature of his responses via a conversation system that, again, bears more than a little resemblance to BioWare's space opera trilogy. While it adds a nice RPG touch to proceedings, it also emphasises the greater focus on narrative that 2K Marin wants to convey in the *XCOM* universe. Carter will meet many people, some that will end up inexorably doomed, bringing all the horrors of a full scale alien invasion home. Whether it works remains to be seen, but a little conversation in harsh, uncertain times with homicidal aliens never hurt anybody.

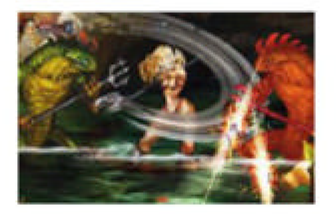
Above: This is Carter, the no nonsense, grizzled character you take control of during the invasion. Notice the experimental backpack he wields. It enables him to levitate objects like turrets, meaning aliens can't take cover. Below: The mix between sci-fi and Sixties Americana feels uneasy at first, but you get used to it after a while.

SHOWCASE

MORE TITLES TO WATCH FOR ON THE GAMING HORIZON

DRAGON'S CROWN

Format: **PS Vita, PS3**
Publisher: **Atlus**
Developer: **Vanillaware**
ETA: **2013**



DRAGON'S CROWN continues to impress as we move ever closer to the Q3 2013 release window. Character trailers have made it online, showcasing the various classes and abilities available in this adorably engaging fantasy RPG. While the PS Vita has been light on games, the four-player online co-operative modes should be enough to satisfy even the most jaded dungeon crawler fanatic.

WONDERFUL 101

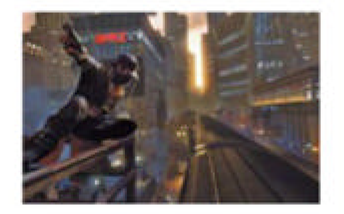
Format: **Wii U**
Publisher: **Nintendo**
Developer: **Platinum Games**
ETA: **2013**



WONDERFUL 101 slipped from its Wii U 'launch window' release to an unspecified 2013 date but that doesn't mean we aren't still excited by Platinum Games' slice of superhero antics. Consistent delays aside, *Wonderful 101* looks to bring Platinum Games' undeniable style together with fun concepts and wacky characters. Atsushi Inaba believes his game will justify the purchase of a Wii U.

WATCH DOGS

Format: **Multi**
Publisher: **Ubisoft**
Developer: **In-house**
ETA: **22 November 2013**



WATCH DOGS is, unsurprisingly, one of the most anticipated games of 2013. We've already heard how it's primed for a cross-generation release – but it now seems PlayStation owners will get a little extra in the way of gameplay. In fact, a full 60 minutes of additional missions will be made available to Sony users following launch this November, no word on whether this will come as DLC for other formats in the future.

KILLER IS DEAD

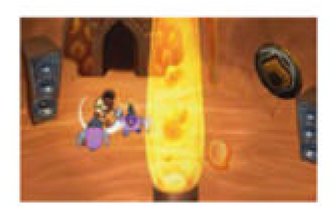
Format: **Multi**
Publisher: **Deep Silver**
Developer: **Grasshopper Manufacture**
ETA: **August 2013**



SUDA 51'S HYPER-EVERYTHING hack-and-slash brawler *Killer Is Dead* continues to barrel towards its August 2013 release date, but it's only now that we are getting the full taste of its depraved and wild ideas. The latest look has protagonist Mondo Zappa taking a trip to the moon for an assassination, and donning 'Gigolo Glasses', which grant him X-Ray vision of the naughty kind. Classic Suda.

SOUL FJORD

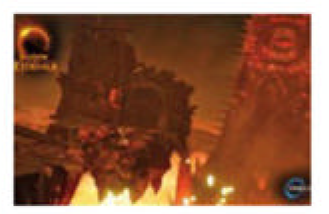
Format: **Ouya**
Publisher: **Airtight Games**
Developer: **In-house**
ETA: **2013**



SO THIS is what Kim Swift, the creator of a little game named *Portal*, has been up to after *Quantum Conundrum* look no further. *Soul Fjord* is a quirky rhythm action dungeon crawler with roguelike elements by the way of Seventies funk. You're either sold or completely turned off by the description, so we will just leave you with the knowledge that it's coming exclusively to Ouya later this year.

SHADOW OF THE ETERNALS

Format: **PC, WII U**
Publisher: **Precursor Games**
Developer: **In-house**
ETA: **2014**



OUT OF the ashes of Silicon Knights, Precursor Games has arisen. While the rights to *Eternal Darkness: Sanity's Requiem* reside with Nintendo, Precursor is forging ahead with a spiritual successor to the psychological horror classic, letting gamers explore an episodic story throughout time. If you're interested in playing *Shadow Of The Eternals* next year, it all depends on whether crowdfunding pays off for it.

BEYOND: TWO SOULS

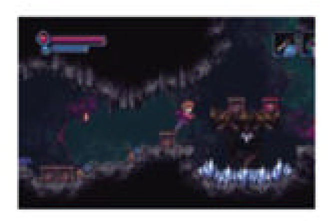
Format: **PS3**
Publisher: **Sony Entertainment**
Developer: **Quantic Dreams**
ETA: **2013**



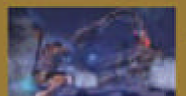
THE BUILD-UP to Quantic Dreams' *Heavy Rain* follow-up *Beyond: Two Souls* has certainly been interesting enough, but as we creep closer to release date we are gleaning a better idea of what to expect. Gameplay looks wildly eclectic and the story seems engaging, so naturally, we have high hopes for *Beyond* – even if it's just to spend ten hours with Ellen Page and Willem Dafoe.

CHASM

Format: **PC, MAC**
Publisher: **Discord Games**
Developer: **In-house**
ETA: **2013**



A LOVING tribute to hack-n-slash adventures of times gone by; Discord Games' *Chasm* is a delightful sidescrolling action-RPG that'll have you questioning why we needed to bother leaving the SNES behind. *Chasm* features gorgeous pixel art, *Metroid*-inspired procedurally-generated dungeons and incredible attention to detail. The current retro revival continues to impress.



DELAYED – Lost Planet 3 (Multi)

Spark Unlimited's *Lost Planet 3* will suffer another delay, as Capcom shifts the release date back from June to 27 August 2013. After the disappointment of *Lost Planet 2*, we can only hope this return to EDNIII is worth the wait.



ANNOUNCED – Minecraft (X360)

While over six million people are enjoying *Minecraft* digitally on Xbox Live, Mojang will be bringing the game to retail disks on 28 June to expand the reach of its wildly popular crafting game.

SHIN MEGAMI TENSEI IV

Format: **3DS**
Publisher: **Atlus**
Developer: **In-house**
ETA: **July 2013**



TO THE delight of Atlus fans around the Western world, the studio's upcoming *Megami Tensei* RPG will be launching this July for 3DS. The first game in the series to feature full voice acting, *Tensei IV* will house an extra treat for prepared pre-order customers, granting everyone from the initial shipment a 176-page strategy and design book as well as a CD celebrating 20 years of fantastic in-game music.

EARTHBOUND

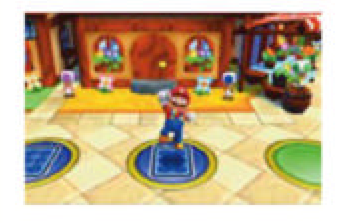
Format: **Wii U**
Publisher: **Nintendo**
Developer: **In-house**
ETA: **2013**



SHIGESATO ITOI'S masterpiece is finally making its way to Europe in 2013, as Nintendo officially sanctions the release of *EarthBound* (or *Mother 2* for our friends across the sea). The long awaited SNES classic will make its way to the Wii U's virtual console, disturbingly though, there is still no word on whether all of the licensed music will make the translation, though we have our fingers crossed.

MARIO PARTY

Format: **3DS**
Publisher: **Nintendo**
Developer: **In-house**
ETA: **Q4 2013**



THE TWELFTH game in the *Mario Party* series is on its way to 3DS this winter, as Nintendo primes yet another update of its frantically fun multiplayer party series. Seven themed boards and over 81 mini-games will be included to test your speed, concentration and luck, obviously. It will also take advantage of the handheld to include AR card games and full Street Pass support.

EVR

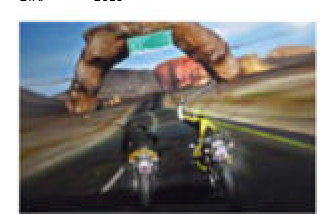
Format: **PC**
Publisher: **CCP Games**
Developer: **In-house**
ETA: **TBA**



AT THIS year's FanFest expo in Iceland, CCP Games showed off what could be the future of *EVE Online*. In a wonderful homage to the dogfights of *Battlestar Galactica* and the *Star Wars: Tie Fighter* games of old, *EVR* is a space combat game designed exclusively for use with the Oculus Rift VR technology. While no release date has yet been stated, it's certainly one to look out for in the coming months.

ROAD REDEMPTION

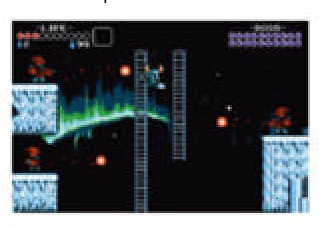
Format: **Wii U, PC, MAC**
Publisher: **DarkSeas Games**
Developer: **In-house**
ETA: **2013**



EA, FOR whatever reason, hasn't been particularly fair to *Road Rash* over the past decade. The motorcycle combat-racing hybrid was a blast in the Mega Drive days, and while its success wavered as 3D systems came into play, it still stands as good fun. *Road Redemption* is an ode to the racers of old; updating the concept with ragdoll physics, melee combat systems and online multiplayer to fray.

SHOVEL KNIGHT

Format: **PC, 3DS, WII U**
Publisher: **Yacht Games**
Developer: **In-house**
ETA: **September 2013**



IF *EARTHBOUND* taught us anything, it's that a game experience truly comes together when design, audio and story work together in beautiful harmony. *Shovel Knight* is channelling *Mother*: taking classic action adventure tropes and infusing them with pixel-perfect platforming, vivid 8-bit stylised graphics and infectious music. *Shovel Knight* also features some of the best boss designs we've seen since 1994.

LOCOCYCLE

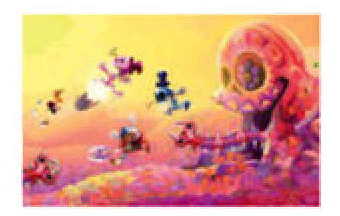
Format: **XBLA**
Publisher: **Microsoft Game Studios**
Developer: **Twisted Pixel**
ETA: **2013**



WE TEND to take notice when Twisted Pixel turns its eclectic mind to a new concept, and the studio's upcoming racer *LocoCycle* has certainly captured our attention. Placing you into the role of a sentient motorcycle that's gone rogue, *LocoCycle* is channelling the feeling of *Tron* meets *Ghost Rider* with its high-speed racing antics. Oh, and Lisa Foiles (*Shiver*) and Robert Patrick (*Terminator 2*) are voicing the bikes.

RAYMAN LEGENDS

Format: **Multi**
Publisher: **Ubisoft**
Developer: **In-house**
ETA: **30 August 2013**



WHILE WE are still hurting from the delay of *Rayman Legends*, Ubisoft is doing as much as possible to give gamers plenty to get excited about. The recent release of the Wii U exclusive online challenge app goes a long way to satisfy our lust for high-end 2D platforming but it's the announcement of a 30 August (EU), 3 September (US) release date that has us marking the calendar.





“There are so many games I love, can I start by making a long list?”

STEFAN STRANDBERG, BATTLEFIELD 4 DIRECTOR

WHY I ♥...

Hidden & Dangerous

STEFAN STRANDBERG – BATTLEFIELD 4 SINGLE-PLAYER DIRECTOR

“There are so many games I love, can I start by making a long list? I started as a real flight sim nerd, I actually worked on a flight simulator way back. I love Condemned*; it has one of the best implementations of melee combat I've ever seen and it has awesome sound design.* Mafia: The City Of Lost Heaven *is also one of my absolute favourite games of all time, which combined this open world with a really strong narrative.*

“Then from Illusion Softworks, the developer of Mafia*, it also did the* Hidden & Dangerous *series, which I really loved, they are really great. It's a tactical first-person shooter, where you could control four other characters and you can jump between them and give them orders – kind of like* Rainbow Six*. In fact...* Rainbow Six: Vegas *is also one of my favourite games!”*



AFTER REDEFINING THE CONTEMPORARY FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER WITH ITS MODERN WARFARE TRILOGY, INFINITY WARD ENTERS A BRAVE NEW ERA WITH CALL OF DUTY: GHOSTS. IS THIS THE NEXT-GENERATION EVOLUTION WE'VE BEEN WAITING FOR?

BEYOND MODERN WARFARE

Los Angeles, 13 May, on the eve of arguably two of the most gargantuan events on the industry calendar, and all eyes are on Activision. In just a week, Microsoft will unveil its hardware revolution to the world and beyond that the Electronic Entertainment Expo promises its most rousing year since the show's inception, but for now this is Bobby Kotick's show and everyone is paying attention. In a sweltering warehouse situated just a stone's throw away from the publisher's Californian headquarters, the exclusive event gathers three studios vital to the publisher's versatile portfolio. We turn to one side of the room and watch Vicarious Visions busily demonstrating how the next phase of *Skylanders* strengthen its dominance over the toy market; at the other end of the venue Bungie's COO Pete Parsons gives little away about *Destiny* as he makes pleasantries with the attendees. But everyone here is looking to one title as an indication of how the publisher will transition into the next-generation of videogame development. "We could've played it safe and made *Modern Warfare 4*," says Activision CEO Eric Hershberg by way of introducing *Call Of Duty: Ghosts*, before cranking hyperbole to the whooping and hollering of the crowd as he promises a "new world, new engine and a new experience."

This statement comes as less of a surprise than the excitable blustering of the audience might suggest. Activision refuses to rest on its laurels, defiantly challenging the assumptions of its insatiable fanbase in its continued pursuit to sustain brand longevity. Both Infinity Ward and Treyarch have endeavoured to make widespread modifications across several iterations: from the minutiae of levelling systems through to the introduction of genre-swapping setpieces (all within a series oft-criticised for lacking innovation). It proves a striking level of diversity beyond its whack-a-mole template, continuing to both serve its legion of dedicated players, while making futile strides to silence the cynical scoffing that accompanies each annual instalment. But while the studio might be loathe to admit it, there's only so much that can be accomplished without radically altering the DNA. That's perhaps why *Call Of Duty: Ghosts* has been touted by many as a fresh start, a do-over to establish the foundations of a new narrative universe for the first time since Infinity Ward abandoned World War II and redefined the contemporary first-person shooter with *Modern Warfare*. So the pertinent question is thus: will *Ghosts* act as a similar reboot set to



A FEW NEW GAMEPLAY TWEAKS INCLUDE A NEW MANTLE SYSTEM THAT ENABLES PLAYERS TO LEAP OVER A WALL WITHOUT LOSING MOMENTUM, A LEAN FEATURE FOR PEERING AROUND COVER AND THE ABILITY TO DRAMATICALLY SLIDE ACROSS AN ENVIRONMENT INTO THE ACTION.

challenge the tropes of a genre verging on stagnation?

"A reboot for the franchise?" responds lead animator at Infinity Ward Zach Volker, pausing to ponder a question he'll undoubtedly be asked innumerable times in the next few months. "We didn't set out for it to be a reboot as much as something that was just new for Infinity Ward. We didn't set out thinking we were going to redefine anything. We said that we wanted to do a take on what we've done in the past and come at it from a different direction. So from that perspective it's new and a lot of the new tech features are new. But we didn't set out to revolutionise anything, or release anything significantly different."

Indeed, that much is abundantly clear when we're shown the first gameplay demo. A riveting cat-and-mouse chase deep in the ocean, which follows two of the eponymous *Ghosts* as they covertly navigate through the tropical reef and the sunken remains of a derelict structure in pursuit of an aircraft carrier bobbing on the surface. As the demo reaches its climax, the action effortlessly transitions from a raucous explosion into a bombastic *Bond*-esque underwater shootout, all before the screen cuts to black and we're left to fill in the blanks. It's representative of the slick histrionics and underrated pacing that defines this well-oiled 60 frames per second killing machine. Executive producer Mark Ruben takes to the stage following the footage to decree that *Ghosts* will tackle tangible issues and balance weighty emotional drama – the story courtesy of the Oscar-winning screenwriter of *Traffic*, Stephen Gaghan – but the only thing that's clear is that *COD* will continue to do what it does best: blow shit up. Sure, it might not be called *Modern Warfare 4* but *Ghosts* is downright playing things safe.

Whether or not you regard that as a bad thing is probably reliant on how many times you've Prestiged over the past five-or-so years. Nevertheless, for everyone else there's still room for optimism; this is, after all, the first entry designed for next-generation hardware, with a bespoke engine built specifically to utilise the increased horsepower of the Xbox One and PlayStation 4. **games™** is given a guided tour of what exactly that means in terms of a visual bump in a jungle environment bursting with realistic vitality. Admiring the photo-real vegetation and advanced lighting systems demonstrates exactly how *Ghosts* will enhance *COD*'s patented cinematic battlefield milieu, with a new HDR-based lighting engine, volumetric lighting effects, self-casting shadows and a bolstered particle count creating an effervescent backdrop.

"The next-gen really allows us to expand what I would say is the immersion level," says Volker. "For the most part we've never felt hindered from a gameplay perspective by tech. We never felt that 'We can only do this if we had a little more horsepower in the CPUs.' We've never really felt that way in general. That's what this is all about: allowing us to bring in a new level of fidelity that just brings the believability and immersion to a new level so that the gameplay experiences that we continue to craft new in this project really step up to a higher level."

This was achieved in no small part by a group of Hollywood artists utilising not just their skill in film VFX but software that has created some of the most revered works of cinema over the past two decades. SubD (or subdivision surfaces) is a process that has been honed most notably by animation house Pixar, which uses a coarser piecewise linear polygon mesh to better approximate an object's smooth surface. Pixar utilises the tech to create a vivid cluster of colourful balloons that angelically lifts a house from its roots; *Call Of Duty* uses it to create equable curvatures on a gun barrel.

The tech showcase continues as we indulge in the photorealism of a collection of pebbles resting

WHETHER YOU PURCHASE THE GAME ON NEXT-GEN HARDWARE OR A PC OR A CURRENT-GEN HARDWARE CONSOLE YOU'RE GOING TO GET THE SAME GAMEPLAY EXPERIENCE



on a stream's shore, all thanks to the technique of displacement mapping – a costly alternative to standard methods used to accurately represent geometry on the fly (most games simply imply the detail). Of course, this almost pornographic detail is destined to go unnoticed by all but the most perceptive players, but it suggests at least the increased importance of photorealism in a new era of console visuals.

"I wouldn't say that photorealism is something that we strive to replicate as much as artistic believability," Volker suggests. "I like to use the example of a Pixar film: they're so beautiful but you wouldn't say they're realistic. They're believable, you feel grounded in that world and the characters feel grounded in that world. They push it past real – they don't go for that hyper-realistic look, they say 'What is realistic?' and 'How can I make the world more beautiful?' They push the colours where you wouldn't normally see them in nature but they're appealing to the eye. That's the look we're going for. The goal is not pure photorealism, the goal is believability."

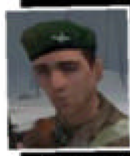
But can a military shooter aspire to believability and photorealism without pushing itself into gratuity and offensiveness? "I think time will tell," replies Volker. "I don't think I can take that leap and assume which way the company wants to go in that regard. But certain things make sense: a solid object that's made of wood or metal – that makes sense. But then you have things like environments and the way you light things, the way you effects filter through, the way the post production or post processing on the screen, the ways those affect it. I think there's more freedom to go around. Does that open up a can of worms in the future? I think it does. You deal with the issue of the uncanny valley, if you get so realistic but don't get it enough it looks crazy. Those are things that we're going to have to deal with because inevitably we're going in that direction. Whether we'll aim for that specifically I can't say but it's something that we're going to have to be careful of, I think."

It disheartens us to say that Captain Price's glorious moustache has failed to impress us today. Its bristly masculinity is currently sharing a 20ft screen with one of *Ghosts*' new character models. This next-gen character model possesses a range of infinitesimal detail that, from dirt resting under his cuticles to the sight of detailed facial blemishes, leaves the beleaguered British warrior looking somewhat

DYNAMIC MAPS ARE SURE TO BE DIVISIVE AMONG THE COMMUNITY. ALONGSIDE DEVASTATING EMERGENT EVENTS, PLAYERS CAN ALSO LAY CONTEXTUAL ENVIRONMENTAL BOOBY TRAPS TO CATCH UNSUSPECTING ENEMIES OFF-GUARD DURING MULTIPLAYER BOUTS.

HOLLYWOOD CALLING

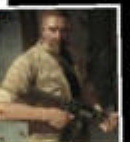
THE FAMILIAR FACES THAT HAVE LENT THEIR VOCALS TO CALL OF DUTY'S MAIN CAMPAIGNS



Jason Statham

GAME: Call Of Duty

The first of many Hollywood stars to lend their gravelly tones to the series, The Stath shouted his way through Infinity Ward's original World War II epic as the unyielding Sergeant Waters.



Gary Oldman

GAME: World At War /Black Ops

Disguising his voice under a thick Russian accent, the most eminent actor to appear in the series to date also delivers the series' arguably most memorable performance as the enigmatic Viktor Reznov.



Sam Worthington

GAME: Black Ops/Black Ops II

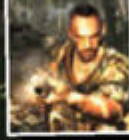
Less engaging Russell Crowe alternative, Sam Worthington, has voiced Alex Mason in both of Treyarch's *Black Ops* titles. The Aussie actor's vocals were memorable if only for struggling to contain his native accent.



Idris Elba

GAME: Modern Warfare 3

***Modern Warfare 3* went bigger and better in every sense, adding Stringer Bell himself to the cast as one of the gruff Delta Force operatives, alongside other notable thesps William Fitchner and Timothy Olyphant.**



Kiefer Sutherland

GAME: World At War

There's an undeniable charm to Sutherland's overdramatic delivery in *World At War*, as the once-Jack Bauer barks orders over your radio and has the uncanny knack for shouting "Dogs!" that instils fear in our souls to this day.



■ *GHOSTS* REFUSES TO IMITATE THE DESTRUCTIBLE ENVIRONMENTS THAT PROVIDED *BATTLEFIELD 4*'S GAMEPLAY UNVEIL ITS MOST BOMBASTIC MOMENTS. INSTEAD THE BESPOKE NEXT-GENERATION ENGINE FOCUSES ON STRENGTHENING THE INIMITABLE CINEMATIC VENEER FOR WHICH THE SERIES HAS BECOME SYNONYMOUS.

COD'S FREE-TO-PLAY FUTURE

■ *Call Of Duty Online* was much-needed solution to an ongoing problem at Activision. While the publisher continued to dominate Western territories with its ubiquitous first-person shooter, Asian regions remained resistant to the craze. Then came *Call Of Duty Online*, a free-to-play extension of the brand available exclusively in China. It offers a selection of maps from across the series and is fuelled by microtransactions that unlock further gameplay content. However negligible this may appear to the majority of fans, Bobby Kotick has acknowledged that the publisher is looking to *COD Online* as a testing ground for a larger product that could apply to Western gamers. It makes sense: given the phenomenal popularity of the franchise that a F2P offering could prove a massive earner for the publisher. The question is whether or not this would act as a separate entity to the full-bodied boxed product, or whether the monetisation and business model could permeate the traditional online experience? While not much has been said in recent months, it's far from improbable to imagine a future where you have to drop 69p to modify your AK47 with an ACOG scope.



IT'S A TOUGH LINE BETWEEN GIVING THE FANS WHAT THEY EXPECT AND BUYING A CALL OF DUTY GAME AND GIVING THEM SOMETHING THAT'S NEW ON TOP OF THAT

obsolete by comparison. However, Price was more than just *that* cracking 'tache that differentiated him from the grizzled cut-and-paste stereotypes that constituted the majority of the cast; he was the rarest of characters across the *Modern Warfare* saga in so much as he possessed *character*.

"What made Soap and Price so significant?" Volker asks when discussing the introduction of the small team of operatives headlining *Ghosts*' story. "To be really close to someone usually takes time and attention and that was what we were able to give people with Price and Soap. They developed relationships with them because they were able to spend a lot of time with them. If you ask someone 'Who really is Price or Soap?' They wouldn't really be able to say anything, as we haven't given out a lot of information.

"But that's really the second tenet of what makes those characters interesting: there is the intimacy of 'This is who I am, these are the choices I make, this is why I make these choices and these are the struggles I'm dealing with.' It's really taking a step back and thinking 'Okay, if these characters need to be significant and believable to the player then how can we do that?' It's about opening up, giving the player an insight into their weaknesses and their strengths. Obviously, because it's *Call Of Duty* and it's about over-the-top action, seeing them do cool things is a necessity. But we're also trying to push a little bit more [information] about who they are as characters."

Does this mean they're scaling back on the spectacle compared to the city-levelling destruction across the entirety of *Modern Warfare 3*'s campaign to focus on character?

"I think that's a good generalisation. It's a little bit pulled back in terms of the scale of everything that was going on," admits Volker. "I would say that the stakes are still high – it really is America that is in the balance – so it's not a trivial thing. It's not like we're losing a city. But at the same time it's not a world-scale battle that's being fought. That's not what the story is about. It's smaller and more intimate.

"It's a tough line between giving the fans what they expect and buying a *Call Of Duty* game and giving them something that's new on top of that," he adds. "It's always a balance between if we don't give them enough of what they expect they say 'Well this isn't *Call Of Duty*, I bought *Call Of Duty*.' And if we don't give them enough new, they complain and say 'You didn't give us anything new!' That's a serious conversation that goes on at Infinity Ward of trying to find that balance."

Observant viewers of the 'Masked Warriors' live-action teaser trailer for *Ghosts* may have spotted an unusually hairy member of the team. While dogs have been a regular franchise component to date – both as a devastating killstreak and an undead menace in the popular zombie mode – this marks the first time that they become an integral ingredient to the single-player experience. We're given mere hints as to how the player will direct the canine companion in the field of battle, used to sniff out explosive devices and directed to savage enemies in combat. We can already imagine the achievements.

"We can't talk too much about exactly what the dog gameplay is going to be like but we did build the dog specifically as a friendly squad mate," explains Volker. "So along with that comes a new AI movement set of getting him to move in a way that's believable and realistic. That includes things like making him act like a dog. Dogs don't go to a position and stay there like a soldier does, which was how we were initially working with him. And then it seemed off and then we realised that dogs don't do that. Dogs go to a position and they sniff around, get bored, go over there, sniff around, they get bored then they come back to you, look up and say 'What are we going to do next?'" It was a revelation for the developer. Not just at the discovery that dogs *can* in fact look up, but in terms of how to realistically convey the mannerisms of the animal – achieved through precision motion capture, with an



THE OCEAN-SET DEMO PROVIDED A STARTLING SHOWCASE FOR THE NEW GAMING ENGINE, WITH LIGHT POURING THROUGH THE OCEAN CEILING AND DOWN ONTO THE COLOURFUL REEF.

army-trained German Shepherd stuck with various balls to recreate its movements in the in-game digital pooch. "Once we started to grasp that understanding of 'Oh yeah, dogs aren't people' then he really started to take on a life of his own."

A canine extension of the playable character might seem a tad disappointing in comparison to previous inventions. Last year Treyarch made significant advancements in the form of Strike Force levels, marking tentative steps to take the ride off the rollercoaster rails, in turn stripping back the linearity that had long stymied the franchise creatively. It's not outrageous to suggest that the once dominant Infinity Ward has been overshadowed by Treyarch's achievements.

However, multiplayer remains a constant fertile opportunity for both studios to strike distinctive approaches to the template consistently being expanded upon. *Black Ops II* proved hugely divisive among the dedicated online community, removing killstreaks for Score Streaks, overhauling the create-a-class system with the Pick 10 mechanic and the decision to allow unlocks to be unaffected upon Prestiging. These tweaks questioned fundamental design principles that have been in place since the original *Modern Warfare*, yet they did little to effect the flow of actual online gameplay. *Ghosts*' takes a more creatively audacious route through unpredictable dynamic maps. Earthquakes that have the propensity to radically transform the scenery; floods that sweep players off their feet; and even spots that enable combatants to set traps, such as exploding doors. This decision dictates a substantial shift in playstyle, which is likely to cause upset among the millions of the series' online elite.

"I think it's just the inevitable pursuit of what's different and new," says Volker when discussing the concept. "Looking at the interactivity of environmental maps, you start to think 'What if we could do something different here that's appropriate for this level but not for maybe any other multiplayer map? This map is very different. This is something we can do here that isn't appropriate for any other multiplayer map.' It spitballed the idea of coming up with some very specific scenes: one of the levels has an earthquake that's constantly going on and off through the level that starts to affect things in different ways. But that's only that one multiplayer map. So it was really an idea of how can we push things further and this was a really creative way of exploring that."

Predictably, there's much left unsaid about *Call Of Duty: Ghosts* at this early stage. Attempts to draw our reticent interviewee to reveal more are met by elusive answers. But there's a sense that Infinity Ward is withholding. *Call Of Duty: Ghosts* will be cross-generation, appearing on current gen systems as well as new hardware, which suggests that the developer might not have been able to fulfil the full extent of its ambitions.

"We never really felt that hardware has ever limited us as far as gameplay goes," explains Volker. "We very rarely felt that 'If only we have more horsepower we can do this cool gameplay thing.' So a lot of what Mark [Ruben] has alluded to on the stage was that a lot of the core horsepower went to the graphical tech that will improve the immersion into those gameplay experiences. One of the benefits that brings is that whether you purchase the game on next-gen hardware or a PC or a current-gen hardware console, you're going to get the same gameplay experience. We're not going to let any player feel left out because they don't have the new shiny console – they don't have a sub gameplay experience to those guys. We really set out that whatever system you got it on you're still going to get the triple-A experience as everyone else. Sure, you're going to have your bells and whistles turned off and the immersion level isn't going to quite be there but it's still going to be the same core gameplay experience that makes you say 'Wow'."

IT'S NOT A WORLD-SCALE BATTLE THAT'S BEING FOUGHT. THAT'S NOT WHAT THE STORY IS ABOUT. IT'S SMALLER AND MORE INTIMATE.

Eliciting such an emotional response will likely be harder than it has ever been for the studio in the past. With next-gen hardware comes next-gen expectations, and fortifying and polishing existing systems might not prove enough for gamers eyeing high-end visuals and expansive gameplay. But Infinity Ward remain firmly focused on the fans, endeavouring to hone the core tenets without compromising the features that made *Call Of Duty* so unstoppable. But in the face of arguably more impressive demons from *Battlefield 4* and *Killzone: Shadow Fall*, we've no doubt that what we've seen is just the tip of the iceberg. After all, Activision will be pulling out all the stops to ensure that over the next year, all eyes remain firmly fixed on *Ghosts*.



TO INFINITY AND BEYOND

INFINITY WARD'S MARK RUBIN DISCUSSES CALL OF DUTY'S CREATIVE TRANSITION TO NEXT-GEN HARDWARE

COD: Ghosts is an all-new canon/narrative for the franchise. Can you talk a bit more about the story and characters in this new entry?
The story opens with an unthinkable mass event that reshapes the world as we know it. Your home lies in ruins. Everything around you is destroyed. At first it's a fight to survive, as the battle lines are drawn. As you pick up the pieces, you and your brother come across the remnants of a group shrouded in mystery, known only as the Ghosts. They are leading the fight back. Together you not only must defend what's left, but take the fight to the enemy before they finish the destruction and end our way of life.

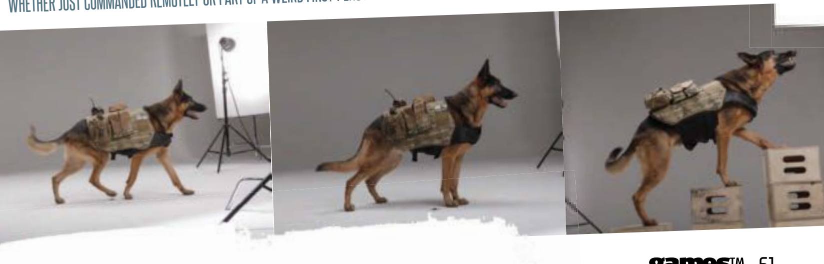
What has developing _COD_ for the next-gen enabled you to do with gameplay that wasn't possible in previous iterations?
The new *Call of Duty* engine lets us create a more immersive experience than ever before. Specifically when we talk about the visual fidelity in the characters and weapons. Even though the new *Call Of Duty* Engine is optimised for the next generation of consoles, it also allows us to also maximize the current generation of hardware.

How do you think the dynamic multiplayer maps will be received, both by the fans and the eSport market? Will players be able to switch off dynamic elements if they want to?
We think that novice and hardcore players will both enjoy the new layer that the dynamic events add. Not only do players need to learn the map, but they also need to learn how to use the dynamic environmental and player controlled events to your advantage. As always, we want to make sure that competitive matches are as good and fair as possible. We will be taking dynamic events into that consideration as well. More on these elements in the coming months.

Do you think a higher level of visual fidelity is crucial for immersing players in a military shooter? Do you think there is a limit in how far you can push photorealism and high quality visuals in this particular genre?
Visuals are important to help immerse the player in the world, but the controls, responsiveness and audio are also really important. At Infinity Ward, it's really about how it feels and visuals are just one part in making the best feeling and playing experience we can.

You've spoken about the emotional connection that players will have to the characters and the canine companion in the single-player campaign. Military shooters have often missed the mark when it comes to creating believable/relatable action heroes – what does _Ghosts_ do differently?
We're really excited about the story we're trying to tell with *Ghosts*. You play alongside your brother throughout the game, and this dynamic is something we've never explored in one of our games. Also, we brought in Oscar-winning screenwriter Stephen Gaghan to work with the team and help craft the story, and he's really helped bring the characters and world to life.

■ DOGS ARE THE MAJOR ADDITION TO THE SINGLE-PLAYER GAMEPLAY EXPERIENCE. WHILE NOT A LOT HAS BEEN SAID ABOUT HOW THEY'LL FUNCTION – WHETHER JUST COMMANDED REMOTELY OR PART OF A WEIRD FIRST-PERSON EXPERIENCE – IT'S AN INTERESTING, IF NOT UNREMARKABLE ADDITION.



CLOSER TO THE EDGE

PlayStation 4's flagship driving game ruthlessly pursues photorealism while redefining in-game social networking. Talking with games™ shortly after the title's announcement, Evolution Studios discuss the decade-long vision for DriveClub



Evolution's collaboration with Sony on the PlayStation 4 hardware has informed many of the design decisions when it comes to *DriveClub*. Evolution insists that the PlayStation 4's PC-based architecture is much friendlier to developers.



While its high-end visual fidelity conjures up comparisons with *Gran Turismo*'s strict simulation, Evolution Studios reassures that *DriveClub* will offer a more accessible experience over a traditional realism.

WE'RE QUICK TO FORGET HOW MONUMENTALLY DIFFERENT THE GAMES INDUSTRY WAS JUST A DECADE AGO. Some labelled it a flashpoint period of radical transformation, where the industry paradigms shifted in ways that would universally inform what we take for granted today. Nascent online services, cutting-edge next-generation technological advancements and a ten billion dollar projected value all pointed to an industry fiercely butting against the walls of probability and expectation. But for a small team of developers located in the quaint countryside of north Cheshire, the industry wasn't moving fast enough.

In 2003, at the apex of PlayStation 2's popularity, Evolution Studios was toying with an idea. Several iterations of the *World Rally Championship* (*WRC*) series had earned the studio global acclaim and commercial success, but the studio aspired to move away from staunch simulation and began to outline a radical project. *DriveClub* would merge social interactivity and a micro-detailed world within a racing simulator dedicated to what it *feels* like to drive, rather than adhere strictly to its physics. But social networking was just in its infancy and videogame engines were far from capable of rendering photo-real textures. And as the studio transitioned from PlayStation 2 to PlayStation 3 development, Evolution took an altogether different direction to the genre with the knockabout irreverence that permeated its preceding festival-based racing franchise, *MotorStorm*. *DriveClub* had stalled, but then so had the genre.

"When I joined the industry, a racing game would sit at the top of the charts every Christmas and we ruled the roost," laments *DriveClub* game director Matt Southern, who joined the studio in 2004. "On PlayStation 3, online multiplayer grew and grew, and racing games struggled to offer the group experience that a *FIFA* or *Call Of Duty* can offer."

Competitive multiplayer's steady consumption of the modern gaming age has already galvanised developers of popular racing franchises to reassess the state of play. While *Forza* and *Gran Turismo* continued to concentrate on the microscopic detail across a dashboard's wooden inlay, Bizarre Creations was trailblazing with social features in the overlooked *Blur*, before Criterion re-emerged to overhaul online multiplayer entirely by introducing Autolog to *Need For Speed*. The industry was embracing community, while increasingly impressive levels of visual fidelity were constantly being achieved. The wheels were in motion, but it would take more to convince Evolution that the industry was ready for a new approach to the genre. What it would take was a whole new approach to consoles.

February 2008, Games Developer Conference in San Francisco and Sony designer Mark Cerny had gathered the publisher's first-party

> "Evolution has always had a reputation for spectacular visuals, and with the help of the PS4's powerful and feature rich GPU, DriveClub is no exception"
>
> GROUP TECHNICAL DIRECTOR SCOTT KIRKLAND

Not a huge amount of details have been released regarding the single and multiplayer features of the title – whether or not *DriveClub* will replicate real-world events or create its own unique scenarios. What we do know is that multiplayer will create tournaments and challenges for players.

> "Driving at 200mph, people usually think that you would miss the micro detail, but subconsciously the detail it adds to the lighting and sense of speed; you soon notice it when it's not there"
>
> TECHNICAL ART DIRECTOR ALEX PERKINS

developers to discuss the future of PlayStation. Evolution didn't attend in person. Stuck on the other side of the Atlantic polishing its latest racer, *MotorStorm: Pacific Rift*, Southern and other members of the studio gathered around a phone in the midnight hours to hear Sony's ambitious plans for its PlayStation 3's successor.

"All my life I've been excited by new console announcements, to see what innovations the next generation will bring," Southern tells **games™** a few short months after Sony's PlayStation 4 announcement. "This one really reflected how we're changing as an industry, recognising the new priorities and philosophies needed to keep console gaming significant."



THE PHONE CALL IN 2008 OUTLINED INITIAL TECHNICAL, EXPERIENTIAL AMBITIONS AND THE PRELIMINARY DIRECTION FOR HARDWARE ARCHITECTURE, AND AS GROUP TECHNICAL DIRECTOR SCOTT KIRKLAND REMEMBERS, SONY'S VISION FOR ITS NEXT CONSOLE WAS CLEAR FROM AN EARLY STAGE. "Mark shared his vision and sought game and studio specific metrics and feedback on a broad array of topics to refine the direction," he says. "Memory, caches, busses, processors, audio, graphics, player and developer network connectivity, IO, content creation tools, and middleware were all covered to varying degrees."

After a succession of meetings and discussions, talk turned to controls and how Sony could further push the functionality of its iconic pad. "We started looking at the DualShock 4 around Christmas 2010 when Shuhei Yoshida introduced us to the Japanese hardware engineers tasked with enhancing the DualShock controller," says Kirkland. "Early prototypes – which wouldn't have looked out of place on the set of a Christopher Nolan *Batman* movie – were demonstrated and discussed before handmade samples and supporting PS3 libraries were shipped to our team early in 2011. Over the following 18 months, a small group of programmers and designers from Evolution tackled a variety of interesting input prototypes to assess the pros and cons of prospective hardware features in the quest for the ultimate controller. "

THE STUDIO REALISED THAT THE PLAYSTATION 4 WAS THE LONG-AWAITED OPPORTUNITY TO FINALLY REALISE ITS VISION FOR *DRIVECLUB*. The DualShock 4 would form the basis of *DriveClub*'s immersive motion steering (which cemented the case for high-speed gyros in the controller), while also informing other aspects of the game's design, such as voice control and UI. Evolution's resolute advocating of Sony's creative decisions with software, platform SDK and development tool improvements proved fundamental in the creation of the hardware. It also pointed towards the challenge of visual fidelity, and ensuring that *DriveClub* could offer and unparalleled tangibility to its real-world locations and vehicles.

DEVELOPING ON PLAYSTATION 4

Evolution Studios' group technical director, Scott Kirkland, discusses the advantages of developing on PlayStation 4 compared to its predecessor

"Contrasting (original) *MotorStorm* and *DriveClub* experiences – both launch titles for their respective platforms – PlayStation development has become significantly more accessible," admits group technical director, Scott Kirkland, when discussing developing on Sony's new hardware. "Paraphrasing the project technical director on *DriveClub*, 'SCEI have really listened to developers!' – a sentiment echoed by the wider development community at the recent PS4 developer conferences in London and Disneyland."

For Evolution, it was important that the PlayStation 4's new architecture enabled creativity to thrive internally, without constantly imposing restrains in regards to tools and time. "We've adopted a more data driven approach to development on PS4 to further reduce design and development iteration times," says Kirkland. "We're able to utilise more shared technology and open source tools and components on PS4 too, so we're increasingly able to focus on game feature development, production improvements, technical innovation, overall presentation and refinement of the game experience – changes that will all benefit the *DriveClub* community."



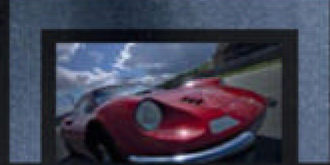
"Evolution has always had a reputation for spectacular visuals, and with the help of the PS4's powerful and feature rich GPU *DriveClub* is no exception," says Kirkland. "Working with physically based materials, we've painstakingly recreated vehicle details such as woven carbon fibre, oily headlight lenses, flecked metallic paint and leather stitching; bringing the cars to life with a diverse array of rich environments that extend from detailed driving surfaces through dense roadside grass and scrub to memorable landmarks, stunning skies, and staggering vistas. Combined with driver animations, dynamic lighting for time of day and cinematic post processing, it looks awesome!"

Photorealism is undoubtedly a crucial sell both in the world of *DriveClub* and on PlayStation 4 as a next-gen platform – but its role in the future of the industry remains a fiercely contested debate. It's a topic that technical art director Alex Perkins is keen to muse on. "Artists here at Evolution have been trying to work towards a filmic, more mature sensibility to games in everything we do for the last few years," he says. "Not so much in content

THE STARTING LINE-UP

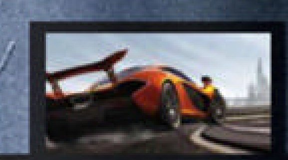
A look at the state of DriveClub's competitors

GRAN TURISMO 6



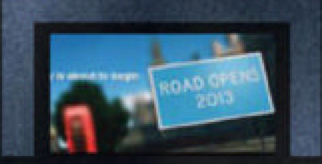
SONY'S ORIGINAL RACING SIMULATOR RETURNS TO THE PLAYSTATION 3 AT THE END OF THE YEAR. UPPING THE GARAGE CAPACITY TO 1200 CARS AND ADDING SEVEN NEW TRACKS, *GRAN TURISMO 6* BOASTS AN ALL-NEW PHYSICS MODEL AND AN ADVANCED GRAPHICS ENGINE THAT INCLUDES ADAPTIVE TESSELLATION.

FORZA MOTORSPORT 5



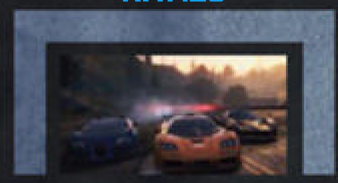
ANNOUNCED AT THE XBOX ONE CONFERENCE IN A BLISTERING PRE-RENDERED TRAILER, TURN 10'S PRESTIGIOUS RACING SERIES MAKES THE JUMP TO THE NEXT GENERATION. DUE OUT FOR THE CONSOLE'S LAUNCH, IT SUGGESTS THAT TURN 10 AND PLAYGROUND GAMES WILL ALTERNATE ANNUALLY ON THE FRANCHISE.

PROJECT GOTHAM RACING 5



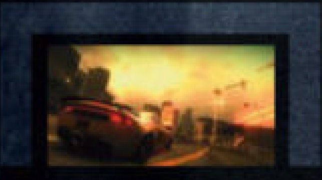
RUMOURS CURRENTLY CIRCULATING SUGGEST LUCID GAMES – FOUNDED BY EX-BIZARRE CREATIONS DEVELOPERS – IS WORKING ON A NEW ENTRY IN THE BIZARRE-DEVELOPED, MICROSOFT-OWNED FRANCHISE, FOLLOWING A FEW TEASING SNAPS LABELLED 'ROAD OPENS 2013'.

NEED FOR SPEED: RIVALS



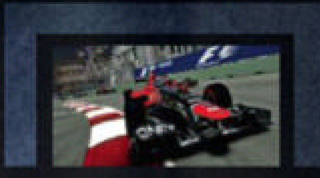
CRITERION GAMES WAS INSTATED *NEED FOR SPEED* OVERSEER JUST PRIOR TO MOST WANTED'S RELEASE LAST YEAR. HOWEVER, GHOST GAMES IS WORKING ON THE LATEST ENTRY, *NEED FOR SPEED: RIVALS*, DUE FOR RELEASE AT THE END OF 2013.

RIDGE RACER DRIFTOPIA



WHILE *RIDGE RACER UNBOUNDED* WAS DISAPPOINTING, DEVELOPER BUGBEAR ENTERTAINMENT RETURNS FOR ANOTHER STAB AT THE FRANCHISE. *RIDGE RACER DRIFTOPIA* IS A FREE-TO-PLAY MICRO-TRANSACTION-FUELLED RELEASE DUE AT THE END OF 2013 ON PC AND PLAYSTATION 3.

F1 2013



CODEMASTERS IS BUSY WORKING ON THE NEXT INSTALMENT IN ITS CLINICAL, ROBUST SPORT SIMULATOR, CONFIRMING ON ITS OFFICIAL FORUMS THAT IT WILL BE RELEASED TOWARDS THE END OF 2013. THE FRANCHISE IS PREDICTED TO TAKE THE LEAP INTO THE NEXT GEN.

but in visual style and aesthetics. Keying our styles to get these sorts of influence across has required working in a more cinematic manner. So lighting and capturing scenes have had a greater concentration on photorealism. While this may not appear to be essential for a driving game, this level of quality and coherency, rather than the garish arcade colour clashes we expect from previous generations, will almost be a requirement." Perkins insists that photorealism will not vanquish all personality from the industry. Quite the opposite, in fact. "This will lead to a proliferation of art styles, moods and storytelling through the camera in the same way as you get within films," he states. "There will always be a place for fantastical, cartoony, even unbelievable styles in games but just as in the CG film industry, they will be tethered to the cinematic sense to set their scenes and stories no matter what their apparent superficial style is."

The pursuit of replicating the high-end VFX in Hollywood has lead to breakthroughs in both micro and macro levels of detail. Your *Forza*s and *Gran Turismo*s have spent years tirelessly attempting to emulate every microcosm of detail on the hobby's most luxurious and timeless vehicles, but *DriveClub* is the first that'll genuinely leave players struggling to spot the difference between the carbon fibre trim of the in-game Agera R and its real-life counterpart. "Driving at 200mph people usually think that you would miss the micro detail, but subconsciously the detail adds to the lighting and sense of speed. You soon notice it when it's not there," states Perkins. "Of course once you've stopped to look at the vehicles and their surroundings at the start/end or in photo mode you can see all those elements come into a stunning image. It's as close as we've come to photorealism and gives all good FPS' more than a run for their graphical money. The look and feel of the vistas, from the nearest pebble to the largest mountain, with a super high detail sports car parked in front look like they're straight from the most expensive of car adverts and that feeds into every approach and process we do for *DriveClub*."

"SOCIAL INTERACTIVITY IS THE *CORE* OF THE *DRIVECLUB* EXPERIENCE," ASSERTS COL RODGERS, WHO SHARES DIRECTOR DUTIES WITH MATT SOUTHERN ON THE PROJECT. "We're building a game that could never have been realised on previous generations of consoles, one which builds a closely networked community of clubs in the game as opposed to a notional community of followers around the game. Our game lets you race the way you want to – it's a set of tools for you to interact with your friends and people like you. It's a social network for racers."

The initial concept behind *DriveClub*'s network features was no doubt spurred by *that* little button adorning the DualShock 4 controller. The 'Share' button enables players to stream competitive matches, spectate on others and participate in community events that feed directly into social interaction within *DriveClub*. So far, so Criterion. But much like *Call Of Duty*, *DriveClub* intends to reinvigorate racing by borrowing ideas from the role-playing genre, utilising team-based strategy that (in much the same way perks, levelling up and XP works in RPGs) rewards players across the team. Indeed, rather eye-rolling obviously, this puts the 'Club' in *DriveClub*; the focus is on collaborative, asynchronous gameplay that creates a racing team of friends to compete against similar crews.

It's a similar proposition to the clans featured in Eutechnyx's free-to-play *Auto Club Revolution* – and no doubt Evolution is betting on the PlayStation community similarly embracing these social and collaborative features. Of course, winning is at the heart of the race, but challenges that range from intense one-shots to accessible

"[The PlayStation 4] really [reflects] how we're changing as an industry, recognising the new priorities and philosophies needed to keep console gaming significant"

GAME DIRECTOR MATT SOUTHERN



While Evolution is focusing on launching a new franchise with *DriveClub*, it casts doubt over the future of the *MotorStorm* franchise – at least in the hands of its original studio.

The Journey

1 The Last Express

JORDAN MECHNER and Smoking Car Productions' Orient Express-set Nineties adventure didn't aim for photorealism, but a rotoscoping process was employed to create lifelike animations from live-action film footage. More common in film (as in *A Scanner Darkly*), each frame of film was painted over and the actor's movements accurately replicated.

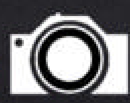
5 Heavy Rain

DAVID CAGE'S engaging mystery title employed motion capture and facial scan technology to spectacular results when *Heavy Rain* was released in 2010. Quantic Dream has further refined its technology to create a lifelike in-game model of pint-sized Hollywood starlet Ellen Page in this year's *Beyond: Two Souls*.

9 DriveClub

The gilded jewel in PlayStation 4's crown, *DriveClub* finally delivers the promise of photorealistic visuals within an in-game environment. Real-world locations and supple muscle cars are replicated with startling parity, heralding the long-awaited arrival of photo-real game design.

To Photorealism



CHARTING THE INDUSTRY'S GLACIAL EVOLUTION TO DRIVECLUB'S PHOTO-REAL VISUALS





Mortal Kombat

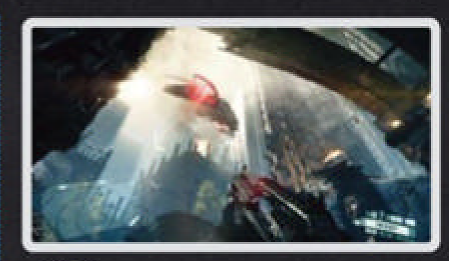
THE USE of digitised sprites in *Mortal Kombat* was by no means an original idea – *Journey* beat them to the punch nearly a decade earlier – but it lent the brutal brawler a sense of hyperrealism. Midway employed actors to act out the movements and gestures of each character to replicate within the game.





Gran Turismo

BY TODAY'S standards it's as crude as a toddler's crayon scrawling, but in 1997 Polyphony Digital's *Gran Turismo* was revered for the attention laboured on its in-car models and real-world tracks. This was during the boom of the sim racing genre, with titles such as *Grand Prix 3* and *F355 Challenge* pushing in-game accuracy through visuals.





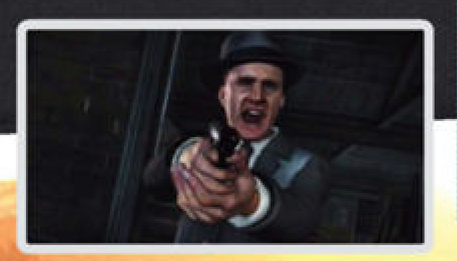
CryEngine

CRYTEK'S CRYENGINE didn't gain major prominence until its second iteration, after the PC-shattering *Crysis* left graphic snobs across the world sobbing. It has since moved onto its third version, which – as seen in *Crysis 3* – pushed photorealistic visuals on the PC and console platforms it was presented on.



LA Noire

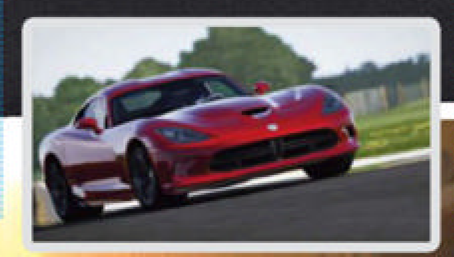
WHILE *HEAVY Rain* stretched the imagination of players, Team Bondi's eclipsed Quantic Dream's efforts with the seven-years-in-the-making period thriller, *LA Noire*. The game featured innovative MotionScan technology, which records across 32 cameras to capture every wince, blink and mannerism of the actor.





Forza/Gran Turismo

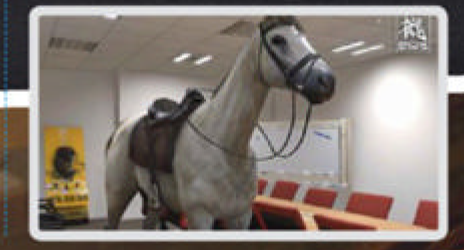
AS THE racing simulator genre continued to accelerate to new levels of immersion and accuracy, so too did the level of visual fidelity. The most recent iterations of both *Gran Turismo* and *Forza* leave few tell-tale signs of their duplicity, and there's little doubt that the next-generation will elevate the standard beyond compare.





FOX Engine

HIDEO KOJIMA has been busy conjuring up a remarkable new engine as the tool for the next chapter in the *Metal Gear Solid* franchise. After a series of covert tweets and several screenshot comparisons of real and digital horses, Kojima Productions revealed the startling new standard for in-game visuals with the FOX Engine.





The studio has been harbouring the idea for *DriveClub* for over a decade. With the social connectivity of PlayStation 4 and its advanced graphics, Evolution Studios has finally been able to realise its dream for its progressive new racer.

The DualShock 4 once again features gyro-based motion steering, which the team insist is the preferred way to play *DriveClub* when it's released on PlayStation 4.

weeklong targets provide incentive across the spectrum of player ability. It pitches *DriveClub* between the devoted simulation of Evolution's *WRC* and the studio's latter balls-out arcade racing in *MotorStorm*.

DriveClub continues to highlight more of the crowd-pleasing PlayStation 4 functionality that was unveiled to raucous approval at the PlayStation Meeting earlier in the year. Evolution hopes that players will aid friends remotely from one console to another: taking over controls to demonstrate where to them where faults and better hone their skills; analysing post-race data to educate in the finer details of the precision mechanics; and share videos that'll encourage others to improve and progress through the racer. It seems the perfect convergence point between platform and product to create a fusion of ideas that wouldn't be possible five years ago.

BOTH EVOLUTION AND SONY HAVE BEEN EFFUSIVE IN REGARDS TO THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PLAYSTATION 4'S HARDWARE AND *DRIVECLUB*'S MYRIAD OF PROGRESSIVE FEATURES, BOTH UNDERSTANDING THAT THE GAME NEEDS TO SPEAK FOR ITSELF ONCE RUBBER HITS THE TARMAC. "Simulation is where we started life," enthuses Southern when discussing *DriveClub*'s slant towards simulator. "We made five *WRC* simulation games for the PlayStation 2 and our founders all made flight simulations like *Eurofighter Typhoon* and *F-29 Retaliator*. Two members of our team used to be simulator designers at BAE Systems – the British aerospace and defence company."

It's no surprise given the dedication to microscopic detail that this commitment to immersion extends to the relatively unique head-cam perspective of the in-game camera. It's not that Evolution hopes players will pour hours into staring at the leather upholstery and wood-panel dashboard, but rather the sense of realism and reality the viewpoint evokes. The DualShock 4 controller too enabled the studio to raise the bar in terms of accuracy and control, with enhanced triggers enabling grater control of acceleration and braking, stiffer springs and smaller deadzones in the sticks improving vehicle precision and high speed gyros providing a natural and responsive motion steering experience. With all this talk of enhanced realism infusing every facet of *DriveClub*'s conceit, you have to wonder what that other Sony-owned racing franchise at Polyphony Digital is cooking up.

"If *Gran Turismo* is a 106-piece orchestra," begins director Col Rodgers, "*DriveClub* is a rock-band with distorted guitars putting on a massive stage show for a stadium crowd. We're not motorsport or engineering, we're united in speed on roads in the real world, having fun and impressing our friends."

> **"We're not motorsport or engineering, we're united in speed on roads in the real world, having fun and impressing our friends"**
>
> DIRECTOR COL RODGERS

Right now *Gran Turismo* is currently greasing its wheels in preparation for its recently announced sixth sequel on PS3, and it's no surprise that Evolution is keen to emphasise the difference between its new racer and Polyphony's prestigious brand. We even dare to prod further: asking whether Sony intends to compete with EA and Microsoft in alternating first-party racing titles on an annual basis? Unsurprisingly, the question is dodged in an admirable fashion with Evolution taking a "different philosophy" to the genre, but we wouldn't be surprised if this PR-styled reply turns out to be the truth – after all, Evolution has always struck its own path.

And now, after a decade brewing internally in the north of England, *DriveClub* is nothing if not defying expectations across the board, demonstrating the burning potential of a future generation of software on a console at the cutting edge of technology. "[Evolution is] trying to show what PlayStation is capable of," concludes Southern. "[We're] doing our best to introduce brand new and exciting experiences. If we're not first or best, we're not happy."

***DriveClub* is scheduled for release on the PlayStation 4 at some time towards the end of 2013.**

Surviving A Changing Industry

Insomniac Games CEO and President Ted Price discusses the challenges of running the studio behind Ratchet & Clank, Spyro The Dragon, Resistance and now Fuse in today's market

It's never been more difficult for an independent studio to stake its claim in the videogame industry. Despite the regular moaning about the clockwork cycle of sequels, the likes of *Call Of Duty* and *Assassin's Creed* still dominate the sales charts. Franchises come and go, characters drift into obscurity and studios are bought and sold with a frightening frequency. For a studio like Insomniac Games, longevity is not assured, but instead earned through experimentation and expansion. Since 1994 president and CEO of Insomniac Ted Price has grown his initial three-person operation out of Burbank, California to become one of the most recognisable outlets in the industry. From creating the PS2's well-regarded platformer characters *Ratchet & Clank* to completing the *Resistance* trilogy on PS3, the studio now houses over 200 employees and a multi-project development structure. This success hasn't been achieved through resting on its laurels, and as we reach the halfway point in the last year of the current generation, Ted Price faces perhaps his most difficult challenge yet; launching a brand new IP at the end of a console cycle.

"Despite the fact that we do have to work really hard to rise above the noise at the end of a console generation, there is a large opportunity for new IP to stand out because there are so many sequels on the market," says Price, after sitting in on a co-operative multiplayer session of *Fuse* with games™. "We hear consistently from gamers that they want something fresh, they want something different from the sequels that they've been playing for years. *Fuse* was an opportunity for us to stand out in that way."

Fuse is the latest title from Insomniac, a four-player co-operative shooter that seemingly housed a very turbulent, and public, development cycle. As discussed in previous issues of games™, it was announced at E3 2011 as *Overstrike*, debuting with an off-kilter style that set itself apart from the gritty pack that seemingly dominated the slate of games planned for the year. *Overstrike*, however, quickly disappeared as Insomniac continued to ramp up excitement for *Resistance 3* and *Ratchet & Clank: All 4 One*, only to reappear rebranded in 2012 as *Fuse*.

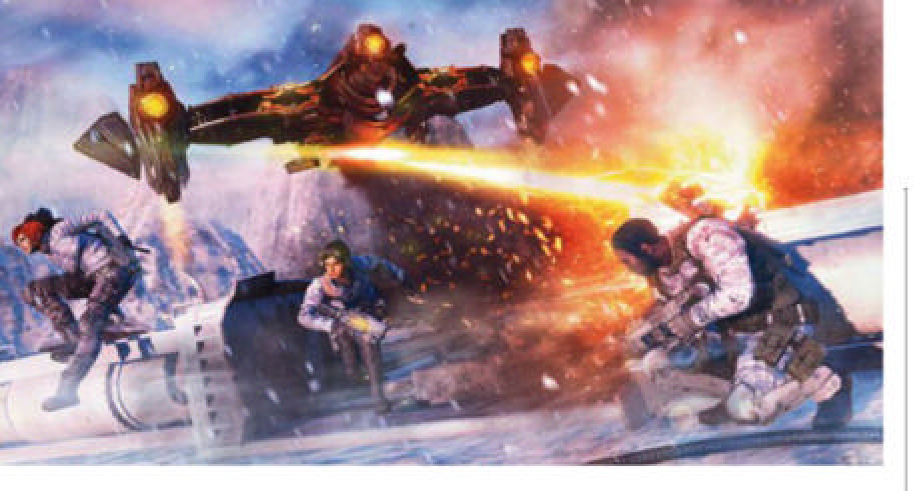
"Every game we've made has had a lot of evolution, some have gone through far greater changes than *Fuse* has," says Price, musing over the public shift of *Fuse*. "[But] I think it made people scratch their heads about what the game really is. Because we shifted its identify half way through production, a lot of questions arose about what the games tone really was, and really whether or not it was a game that felt like an Insomniac game."

Somewhere along the way, between *Overstrike* and *Fuse*, the shooter shed its skin. *Fuse* did away with the



Ted Price has built his company gradually over two decades to become one of the leading companies in the entire industry. It's a massive accomplishment for the independent developer.

"We've been associated with one series of platforms and a few franchises for a long time, but we are, however, an IP creator. That's what we like to do"



Borderlands-channeled graphics and the wacky humour that seemed to pump through the veins of *Overstrike*, and in its place was the standard template for shooter success. Hyper-realised colours were replaced with muted equivalents and the outlandish *Incredibles*-inspired weaponry was nowhere to be seen. Many surmised that this was a result of Insomniac's partnership with publishing giant EA, though in reality the shift was far less sinister.

"There was a distinct point in time where we were driven internally to change *Overstrike* because the weapons weren't working," reveals Price. "When we showed off the game in 2011 we had fun concepts on paper, but [the weapons] were not particularly satisfying to use in combat, and we had to go back to the drawing board with all of them to get the core fun factor in."

"Thus when we started taking the glue gun, which we showed off in 2011, to the shatter gun, and changing the electric crossbow to the Arcshot and the giving the shield better functionality and coming up with the warp rifle from scratch, the game changed in a really good way. The rest of the game, story and characters, followed with the weapons at the core driving everything," says Price decisively.

First impressions be damned, with *Fuse*, playing is believing. As you'll see from the review in this month's issue of games™, *Fuse* is a confident co-op third-person shooter. Merging fast thrills and larger than life sci-fi weaponry into its core design, *Fuse* might not be as obviously quirky as *Overstrike* presented itself to be, but beneath the surface, *Fuse* is undeniably an Insomniac title. As with *Ratchet* and *Resistance* before it, the weapon and combat systems drive the experience. Players can combine weaponry on the move to create visually stimulating, not to mention combat effective, scenarios quite unlike anything else in the shooter field. The warp gun creates black holes across the battlefield that can in turn be expanded with fiery rage by the Arcshot – a crossbow that launches fiery arrows – to create quite the bloodthirsty spectacle. It's not surprising that the combat drove much of the development, and presented the largest hurdle for the studio to overcome. Co-op is often an afterthought in development, no surprise considering the splintered state of the Xbox Live and PlayStation Networks, but Insomniac was determined to deliver a product that succeeded on both multi and single-player fronts.

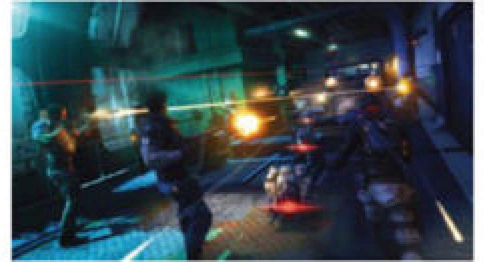
"That was the key, figuring out that particular puzzle. When we began the process, the goal was to have a four-character game and raise the bar for co-op. But at the same time we knew we couldn't deliver that for the Insomniac fans and get a good response," says Price. "Traditionally, a lot of the games that have led with co-op haven't been particularly strong with the solo campaigns and therefore we decided that we had to put equal effort into both.

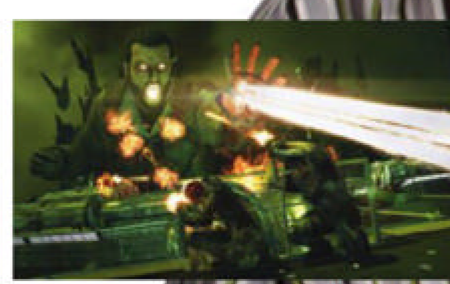
"The key to solving that problem was to make the call that there are always four characters in the game. That allowed us to design our spaces more appropriately and think about combat and enemy behaviour in terms of fighting against a four-player team. That helped us significantly with the single-player campaign. The other thing we didn't do is split the campaign. So, in other words, no matter how many people you are playing with, you are always playing through the same story-driven campaign. There's not a difference, and that is always really useful from a design perspective."

Price's perspective on the industry hasn't shifted much in two decades. Even when leaving the relative safety of his established franchises behind for a new venture, he's as excitable as any budding new indie developer. It doesn't concern Price that the likes of Sony's PlayStation 4 and Microsoft's Xbox One are vying for the attention of gamers; he believes *Fuse* is a fun experience no matter what console you experience it on.

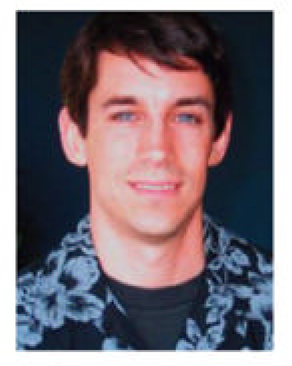
● From *Disruptor* to *Fuse*, all of Insomniac's games have attempted to blend an array of fun mechanics and interesting weaponry together.

● Four-player co-operative games are far and few between, *Fuse* supports both four player online and two player split-screen options for games with a social streak.



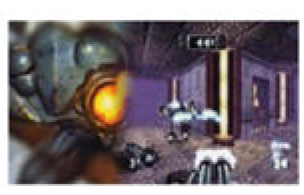


TIMELINE OF SUCCESS



From humble beginnings as a three person start-up to the 200-plus world renowned studio it is today, Insomniac Games has come a long way since its FPS debut *Disruptor*. Ted Price has created some of gaming's most recognisable faces in *Spyro The Dragon* and *Ratchet & Clank*. Never one to rest on his laurels though, Price returned to his FPS roots in 2006 to help launch the PlayStation 3 with *Resistance: Fall Of Man*. Since *Ratchet & Clank* in 2002, all Insomniac titles have carried a recognisable stamp of ownership – they almost exclusively feature an arsenal of weapons that dabble in the absurd, and that mantra carries over to the studio's Xbox 360 debut, *Fuse*.

DISRUPTOR, 1996 [PS1]



■ Released at the tail end of 1996, *Disruptor* was Ted Price and Insomniac Games' first venture into the videogame industry. A globetrotting sci-fi shooter that differentiated itself from the *Doom* clones that steadily built up on the PlayStation 1, it allowed players to harness Psionics, which granted powers like the ability to drain and shock enemies. A success that took a vital role in Insomniac's humble beginnings.

Ted Price is excited by what the next generation can offer the videogame industry, he is particularly interested in Sony's promises of a shared future.

When we began developing the game, nobody had any idea when the next generation of consoles would come out. So we actually began building a brand new engine and toolset looking ahead to the next-gen, but also focusing on releasing *Fuse* on PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360. When we eventually understood when the new consoles would come out we were already so far into the process that it wouldn't make a lot of sense to hold it back," says Price, clearly excited to be expanding his company's horizons.

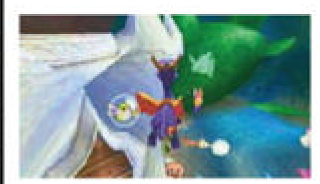
It's interesting to hear Price speak of the Xbox 360 in conversation given Insomniac's history. Two decades of Insomniac games exclusive to Sony platforms tend to lead towards brand familiarity, yet as *Fuse* marks the first of the studios titles to make it to the Xbox 360, it opens a world of possibilities for the self-certified IP creator.

> *"At the end of a console generation, there is a large opportunity for new IP to stand out because there are so many sequels on the market"*

"We've been associated with one series of platforms and a few franchises for a long time, but we are, however, an IP creator. That's what we like to do," Price says. "As an independent developer we have choices, and that's what's great. Certainly our relationship with Sony has continued to be strong over the years, and we have a lot of respect for the people at Sony on all levels. One of the great things about them is they've been consistent in terms of their personnel, as far as the folks we've worked with, since *Spyro*, and that's awesome. We've developed a lot of great relationships over the years.

"As we have grown we have had the chance to make more and more IP, especially more IP that we own. As an independent studio, I believe this is an important factor in long-term stability and success. Of course, what really drives success is making great games and when you're in the new IP business it is challenging. Coming up with ideas and making them work and finding an audience for all of them is

SPYRO THE DRAGON, 1998 [PS1]

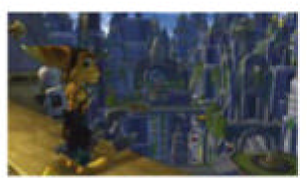


Spyro The Dragon put Insomniac Games on the map. The PlayStation 1 classic took players on a platforming adventure that defined many a childhood through the late Nineties. Spyro promptly became one of Sony's leading faces, fronting a fun and accessible platformer that helped the company bring players away from Nintendo and Sega. It was followed by *Spyro 2: Ripto's Rage!* and *Spyro: Year Of The Dragon*.



Spyro recently had a return to public consciousness with *Skylanders* at Activision, but it was Ted Price and Insomniac that established the character.

RATCHET & CLANK, 2002 [PS2]



While many will always remember Insomniac for *Spyro*, it was *Ratchet & Clank* that solidified the studio as an unstoppable force in the platforming genre. Mixing clever level design, wacky weaponry and lovable characters, *Ratchet & Clank* proved to be the studio's biggest success, with the 2002 character debut followed by *Locked And Loaded* [2003], *Ratchet & Clank 3* [2004] and *Ratchet: Gladiator* [2005].

● *Overstrike* was rebranded to *Fuse* in 2012, which worried gamers across the world. The end result is a fun and fast third-person shooter that surpasses expectation, at least in regards to its multiplayer.



never a given. It just means we have to work particularly hard to make it a reality, however; most of the people who come to Insomniac come because we have the wherewithal to make new IP and that is an exciting process – especially when everybody gets involved and starts contributing ideas. It's one of those truly energising aspects of being in the videogame industry, where in general it's a team process for most of development, versus I'd say the movie industry where you have a director and a writer, and a couple of people calling the shots. Even though we have direction and organisation, we try to be as inclusive as possible."

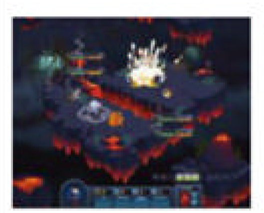
Price, of course, isn't leaving Sony behind entirely, in fact he's very excited by prospect of the next generation of consoles and what they can offer his studio. He's already stated his intention to leave *Resistance* behind as an Insomniac trilogy, though he wouldn't offer any hints as to what his team is beginning to conceptualise – speaking only of the successful unveiling of the PlayStation 4.

"I thought it was great that they had Mark Cerny up there explaining the features. Mark has been a partner of ours in the past and helped us in the early days with *Spyro*, and *Ratchet* – and even *Resistance*. He is very well respected in the industry, especially among developers, so I think he was the right guy to deliver Sony's message," he says, offering high praise to the lead system architect that he worked alongside at the Universal Interactive Studios lot back in the late Nineties.

Due to NDAs, Price could only speak in a limited capacity on the PlayStation 4, though he was more than happy to talk about one particular function – the share button. The backbone of Sony's future of the next-gen, the next iteration of the DualShock controller harnesses the power of our always-on community to let gamers share content like never before. While we question the limitations of the West's internet speeds working with Sony's vision, it is an exciting prospect for player and developers alike.



"That Sony is embracing more connectivity between gamers demonstrates that it knows where the market is going"



● *Outernauts* was a brave experiment for Insomniac, a venture into social gaming with an aim to bring in a hardcore audience.

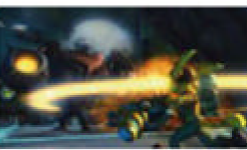
"The Share functions, that was it for me. That Sony is embracing and endorsing more connectivity between gamers demonstrates that it knows where the market is going. We believe that gamers are becoming a hell of a lot more connected, and that's facilitated by hardware. But it's also facilitated by the industries outside of the gaming industry, which are also creating a more co-operative experience across all media – the idea that the world is a more and more connected place," says Price with a smile. "I like it! I like it as a gamer and I like it as a non-gamer."

Resistance: Fall Of Man, 2006 [PS3]



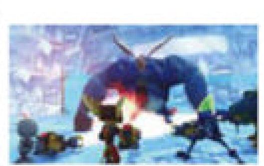
■ Insomniac developed its eighth game to help usher in Sony's PlayStation 3 with *Resistance: Fall Of Man*. Proving to be the most popular launch title for Sony, *Resistance* took players against a deadly alien threat with a host of great weapons and tense gameplay to see in the generation. The franchise did well for *Insomniac* and *Resistance 2* [2008] and *Resistance 3* [2011] later followed.

Ratchet & Clank: Tools Of Destruction, 2007 [PS3]



■ *Ratchet & Clank* returned for the PS3, broadening the franchise's horizons. *Tools Of Destruction* kickstarted the 'Future' trilogy that would see new gameplay mechanics and systems introduced across PSN released *Quest For Booty* [2008] and later *A Crack In Time* [2009]. The trilogy represents the last *Ratchet* games released with old school platforming sensibilities.

Ratchet & Clank: All 4 One, 2011 [PS3]



■ Following fan request for new experiences within the *Ratchet & Clank* universe, Insomniac developed *All 4 One*, a four player co-op adventure continuing on from *A Crack In Time*, and *Q-Force* [2012], a tower defence game at heart. The games split fans, with many longing for Insomniac to return to the platforming days of the wildly popular *Future* saga.

From the studio's debut in 1996 with *Disruptor*, to the release of *Fuse* in 2013 and beyond, Ted Price has worked through four console generations. He assures us that the way he operates, his commitment to new IP and generating new experiences, really hasn't changed as much as you might have expected.

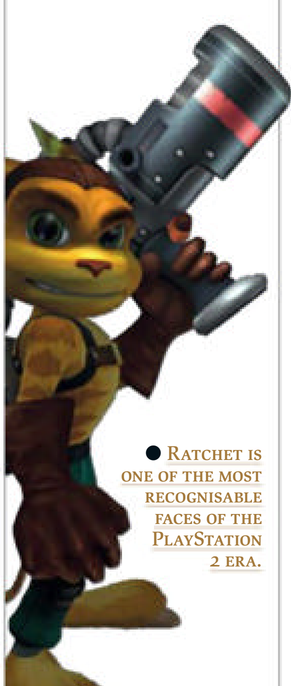
"Over the last five years we have remained consistent in size and we have embraced a multi-project production workflow which is useful because we have a lot of shared resources to support multiple games and we can continually be in production, which is helpful for not only spreading out risk but looking at other opportunities. For example, we are moving into the mobile space with *Outernauts* right now and having the bandwidth to address growing trends in the market is I think crucial in today's fluid videogame world," he says.

As we begin to wrap up our conversation with Price, we couldn't help but dive back to one of the PlayStation's most iconic and beloved franchises, *Spyro The Dragon*. Recently given new life by Activision through the wildly popular *Skylanders* series, we were eager to see whether Price would give the dragon another shot at a solo adventure were he given the chance. Disappointingly, he is just happy to see his creation back to being as popular as it was in 1998.

"I applaud Activision for making the choices they did," says Price. "I think going the route with toys was brilliant. It was a big risk, the inventory costs [and] the manufacturing costs were probably significant – but they made it work! What's wonderful for Insomniac, as the creator of *Spyro*, is to see it regain new life and generate an entirely new group of fans… who probably have no idea who Insomniac is!" He laughs, adding. "But it is still gratifying to watch the joy that these new *Spyro* fans have when they're playing with their *Spyro* toys and connecting them to the game."

Even with Price keeping schtum on what's next for Insomniac, some things are a given. With Rainmaker Entertainment recently acquiring the rights to build an animated feature around *Ratchet & Clank*, we will see more platforming antics in the studio's future, and the prospect of the movie certainly excites the developer.

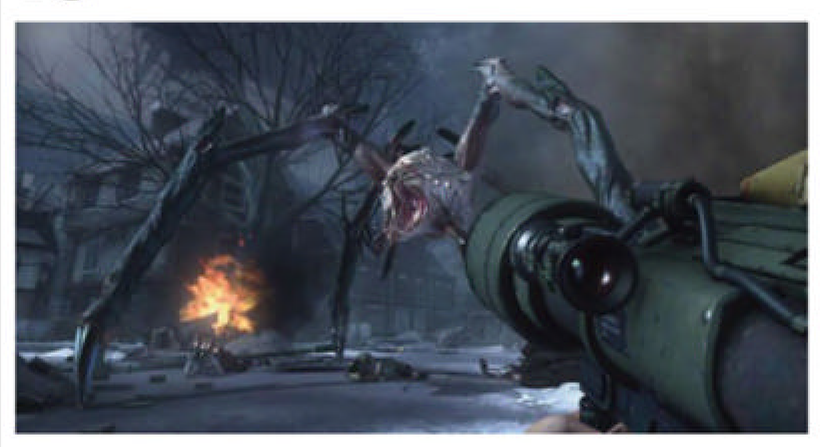
"I think any time a game IP makes a leap across a boundary, it creates the opportunity for bringing in more fans. With *Ratchet & Clank*, which has been a mainstay for the PlayStation for a long time, we believe it will bring in a lot of the existing fans but will hopefully it expose a new generation of kids and their families to the franchise," he says.



● Ratchet is one of the most recognisable faces of the PlayStation 2 era.

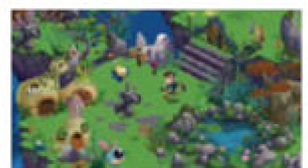
Fans of Ratchet have seen the series become increasingly splintered as of late, however. Following 2007's *Tools Of Destruction*, the series has dipped its toes into a variety of distribution and gameplay experiments. We've seen shorter campaigns released directly to fans through the PlayStation Network Store, and following outcry from players demanding new experiences within the *Ratchet & Clank* world, we've seen titles like *All 4 One* and *Q-Force* launch in attempt to satisfy multiplayer hungry fans. With a franchise so well-known, though, Price is aware that you can't satisfy all players, and this is an issue that weighs on his mind as he approaches a whole new generation of gamers and hardware – what can Insomniac do to keep its staple, dependable franchise evergreen?

"That's a great question and it's one we are constantly struggling with, because there isn't really a right answer. It's a balancing act between providing something that's familiar for fans of the franchise while branching out just enough to keep them interested. If we make a carbon copy of a previous *Ratchet* then we get slammed by players who ask, 'What are you guys trying to pull? Give us something new.' At the same time, when we move in different directions – and we have [with] *Deadlocked*, *All 4 One* and *Q-Force* – we also get blunt feedback from fans, and the feedback is usually, 'Why didn't you make a classic *Ratchet* adventure for me?" Price laughed, adding. "So you can't please everybody, but our goal is to mix it up and keep things fresh for the fans that want to see the *Ratchet* franchise continue to evolve."



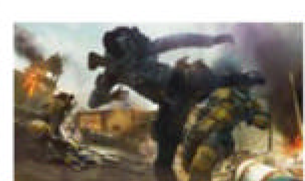
● Insomniac saw in the launch of the PS3 with *Resistance: Fall Of Man*, a decent FPS that had a wide variety of weapons and a slightly arcade-y style.

Outernauts 2012 [Facebook]



■ *Outernauts* represents a shift in Insomniac's publishing plans. Ted Price wanted the game to bridge the gap between hardcore and social gamers, though the Facebook release didn't perform as well as he hoped. *Outernauts* is receiving a fine-tune as we write this, before it sees a mobile release later in the year, with improved mechanics for the platform.

Fuse 2013 [PS3, X360]



■ The first IP Insomniac has outright owned, *Fuse* (originally *Overstrike*) went through a very public shift in tone and style, though this seems to have worked out for the best. A universe-trotting game that takes players through sleek sci-fi installations, beautiful jungles and crazy space levels – *Fuse* might be Insomniac's most ambitious title to date.

"Every game we've made has had a lot of evolution, some have gone through far greater changes than Fuse has"

20 GAMES INDUSTRY RULE BUSTERS

From reinventing business models to revolutionising gameplay mechanics, breaking the rules is usually the spark for change in the games industry. Here are twenty key instances where refusing to obey the rules ultimately had a positive effect on the medium, one way or another...



DOUBLE FINE ADVENTURE

SETTING THE KICKSTARTER STANDARD

→ **Year** 2012

1 WHETHER YOU BELIEVE that crowdfunding is a good thing or not, Double Fine's $3,336,371 haul significantly excelled its modest $400,000 target and changed the mainstream thinking behind traditional development models. Suddenly, the power was in the hands of the fans, and games that might not have been greenlit by publishers in today's mainstream market found prominence on Kickstarter and other crowdfunding platforms. PC revivals tend to find the most fortune in this landscape, which suggest some limits in terms of its potential – yet the support of *Broken Age* sends a signal of hope for mid-sized developers hoping to launch their own projects in this fashion, even if the odd aspect of paying for something before it's been created is worthy of discussion.



THE DS DOUBLE SCREEN

A MUCH-CRITICISED IDEA AWAKENS A NEW GENERATION OF GAMERS

➜ **Year** 2004

4 HOW WOULD IT work? How would players be able to look at two screens at once? The concept of the DS interface was frequently questioned before the handheld's release, yet the once-unusual control scheme of having a touchscreen below a display ultimately became key to the console's ability in reaching mainstream audiences. Indeed, it paved the way for the domination of iPhone apps by showing the sales potential of that particular userbase – to gamers now, well-versed with the interactive potential of the DS and its successor, it's clear that Nintendo's initial bravery yielded positive results, both commercially and creatively.

ATARI 2600 CARTRIDGES

EASING THE CONVENIENCE OF LOADING GAMES

➜ **Year** 1977

3 WHILE TECHNICALLY NOT the first console to use cartridges, the Atari 2600 brought that idea to a bigger platform and made it the industry standard, as well as jumpstarting games as a major commercial proposition (even if it also brought the market to its knees during the 1983 crash). The foundations of almost every console that followed were found in the Atari 2600, and while it did house a lot of shovelware, the cartridge busted the conventional thinking about how games should be packaged and distributed to consumers.

STEAM

SHOWING THE WORLD WHY DIGITAL-ONLY MATTERS

➜ **Year** 2003

2 POWERING THE COMMERCIAL and cultural revival of PC gaming, Steam's rise has been there at every step of the way in the resurrection of the format, to the point where players grumble if a game isn't released on the platform. Valve pioneered a method of reaching a huge audience that broke the traditional rules on selling full games online, while also integrating community elements that have been key to its continued success. The infamous Steam sales, meanwhile, have become a dangerously addictive event in their own right, allowing us to fill entire hard drives with old games we'll never touch again. We're still a long way from a digital-only industry, but Valve made that seem viable to masses of dedicated consumers.

MOLYDEUX

WHEN INDUSTRY SATIRE TAKES ON A LIFE OF ITS OWN

➜ **Year** 2009

5 FROM AN AMUSING Twitter parody to the subject of a high-profile games jam and a Lionhead-ratified element of popular culture, Molydeux playfully sends up Peter Molyneux's high aspirations of game design to an audience of almost 70,000 Twitter followers. A great recent example: "Just imagine if all people were lenses? Looking through certain people in certain places reveal secrets in the environment." Molyjam generated hundreds of different games that took their inspiration from single entertaining Tweets, and the creativity demonstrated within a numbers of those titles no doubt made Molyneux proud (he played over 250 of the products developed). Molydeux's creator and game developer, Adam Capone, clearly satirises Molyneux from a respectful point of view, and that's part of the fun; whatever way you look at it, Peter Molyneux's perspective on game design is valuable, and Molydeux is simply a positive exponent of that.

MS PAC-MAN

THE FIRST FEMALE PROTAGONIST IN A VIDEOGAME

➜ **Year** 1981

6 Ms Pac-Man was the first playable female character in a game, and while there's nothing mind-blowing about this arcade sprite in terms of portrayal or characterisation, it nonetheless made sure the medium didn't exclusively become a boy's club. It's fair to say that female characters still aren't well represented in videogames, however, and we don't just mean that in terms of numbers; we're talking about depiction, as well. Protagonists as rich as Alyx Vance are a rarity, which is perhaps a symbol of the medium's lack of maturity, and is undoubtedly something that needs to be tackled head-on by blockbuster developers. Ms Pac-Man was the first step on a very slow journey to some kind of parity, however, and defying traditional thinking in this fashion can only be seen as a promising sign.

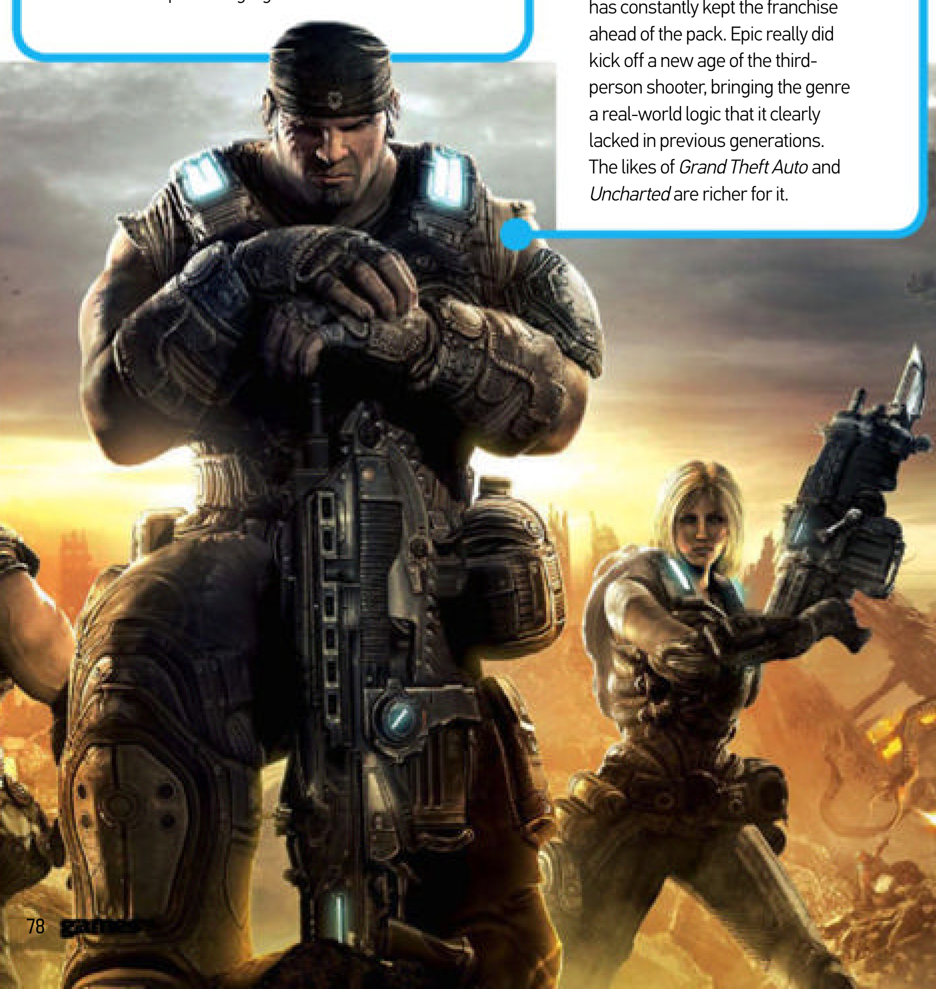


GEARS OF WAR'S COVER SYSTEM

SOLVING THE THIRD-PERSON SHOOTER GENRE

➜ **Year** 2006

7 Third-person shooters, as well as the associated genres, now have the cover system written into their language because of *Gears Of War*'s impact on the development community. The 2006 shooter popularised and refined a mechanic borrowed from *Kill Switch*, then married it to the over the shoulder point of view seen in *Resident Evil 4*, creating something that could be broadly interpreted by other developers depending on the needs of their game's design. Yet this isn't just a question of who got there first; *Gears* brought a technical language to the cover system that has constantly kept the franchise ahead of the pack. Epic really did kick off a new age of the third-person shooter, bringing the genre a real-world logic that it clearly lacked in previous generations. The likes of *Grand Theft Auto* and *Uncharted* are richer for it.





JET SET WILLY: PIONEERING THE PATCH

THE BIRTH OF A MODERN GAMING IRRITANT

➜ **Year** 1984

8 As thousands of copies of *Jet Set Willy* had players stuck due to a spread of bugs, Software Projects was forced to admit the issue and solve the problem. It's hard to imagine living in a world where that would still be considered a big deal, given how many triple-A games ship with day one patches as standard, along with more down the line to sour the simplicity of the console experience. *Jet Set Willy* broke the rules by effectively changing the game after its release – while necessary for that specific title, it arguably set an irritating precedent. We now live in a world where switching on your PS3 to settle down with *LittleBigPlanet 2*, having not played it since launch, bombards you with updates that can take upwards of half an hour to download and install. We can't blame *Jet Set Willy* alone for that, but still.

CURIOSITY: WHAT'S INSIDE THE CUBE?

THE SOCIAL EXPERIMENT THAT SET OUT TO PROVOKE DISCUSSION

Year 2012

9 *Curiosity* quickly became the source of much anger when it dropped onto the App Store last year, yet this compelling piece of software from 22Cans created discussion in a way that any significant piece of entertainment should. That, to us, was as much the point of the Cube as the contents inside: the power to be the sole digital god in Molyneux's upcoming *Godus* as well as some form of profit participation. Regardless of whatever statistics 22Cans takes away from its users' experiences and how that data is incorporated, *Curiosity* once again showcased Peter Molyneux's skill in generating provocative game design.



SUPER MARIO 64

SETTING THE TEMPLATE FOR MODERN 3D GAMES

➜ **Year** 1996

10 *Super Mario 64* had an obvious, undeniable influence on game designers of the late Nineties and early Noughties. It didn't simply translate 2D platformers to this new dimension, it used every bit of the potential within that to enhance the design of *Mario* games, switching straightforward platforming mechanics for more of an action-adventure approach. This was a huge risk for Nintendo at the time – and frankly, none of Mario's other contemporaries made the jump to 3D successfully in the same way, so beholden as they were to their previous iterations. *Mario 64* broke the rules by essentially changing the fundamentals of its genre, and in doing so it set the rules for many 3D games that followed. Indeed, *Mario 64* and *Ocarina Of Time* were recently cited by Rockstar Games' Dan Houser as major influences on his own games in an interview with the *New York Times*. "Anyone who makes 3D games who says they've not borrowed something from *Mario* or *Zelda* is lying – from the games on Nintendo 64, not necessarily the ones from today."

MODERN WARFARE MULTIPLAYER

BRIDGING THE FPS AND RPG GENRES

➜ **Year** 2007

11 *Call Of Duty*'s multiplayer feedback loop is uniquely compelling, and the experience system within that is undoubtedly the reason behind its continually monstrous sales. Sometimes *Call Of Duty*'s success is dismissed for pandering to the mainstream, or just for being the right game at the right time – yet it originally came down to game design that considered the reactions of its audience, in mixing the instant gratification of FPS competition with long-term multiplayer progression. Everyone else was left playing catch-up.

DREAMCAST'S ONLINE FEATURES

DEMONSTRATING THE BENEFIT OF ONLINE CONSOLES

➜ **Year** 1998

12 The Dreamcast was a milestone in the acceptance and popularity of online features on consoles, regardless of its minimal success as an actual platform. *Phantasy Star Online* and *Quake III Arena* maintained a loyal userbase throughout the Dreamcast's lifespan, and the range of online options available to users in the late Nineties was ahead of its time – too much, in fact, for it to take off on a desirable level for Sega. Microsoft undoubtedly learned lessons from Sega's final console, building the original Xbox with online play in mind from the start, and found a generation of players more willing to embrace it than Sega did. Still, it was the start of something, even though some of Sega's competitors weren't nearly as certain that console online play had untapped potential.

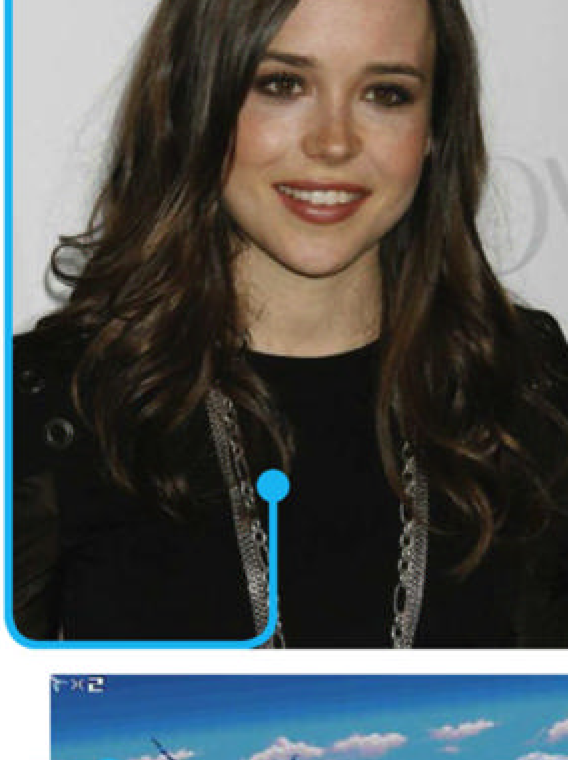


NEW STAR SOCCER BEATS FIFA

THE INDIE FOOTBALL SIM THAT CAUSED A BAFTA UPSET

➔ **Year** 2012

13 Despite being a well-regarded PC and Mac series since 2003, *New Star Soccer* only really got its due attention after arriving on iOS and Android last year. As an addictive escape from England's embarrassingly boring performance at Euro 2012, it reached a willing audience thanks to its imaginative vision of what it's like to be a footballer, right down to the minute details of dumping girlfriends, negotiating pay packets and buying yourself frivolous nonsense. Yet it replicates the sport itself equally well, allowing you to take on the dramatic moments of each game to shape the results. The iOS port captured the public's imagination, leading to a BAFTA win for Best Sports/Fitness game, beating out *FIFA*, *Trials Evolution* and more. That shouldn't exactly be viewed as a declaration that *New Star Soccer* is better or more significant than EA's franchise – instead, it represents another watershed moment for the impact and recognition of indie titles versus their big-budget brethren.



BUNGIE GOING INDEPENDENT

ABANDONING THE HALO SAFETY NET

➔ **Year** 2007

14 One of the more surprising moves over the last console generation was Bungie's self-bought independence from Microsoft, releasing itself from its lucrative role as the custodians of the *Halo* franchise. While Microsoft and the rest of the world would no doubt have been happy to let Bungie make *Halo* titles until the end of time, the developer yearned to create different universes and characters, going on its own and debuting *Destiny* to the world in conjunction with Activision. Whether this new intellectual property is successful or not – and, chances are it will be, given how it was positioned at the PlayStation 4 unveiling – the boldness of this venture has to be admired.





STAR FOX: THE SUPER FX CHIP

NINTENDO'S RISKY VENTURE INTO 3D

➔ **Year** 1993

15 *Star Fox*'s Super FX chip allowed the game to expand the functionality of the SNES hardware, and in doing so, gave us an early glimpse at Nintendo's innovative ventures into 3D. While the capabilities of Super FX were limited – it didn't exactly give much capacity for detail on ships or environments – Argonaut and Nintendo found beautiful art direction in simplicity, and players responded to the bravery of such a choice, even in spite of its higher price tag. The most impressive instance of rule-breaking here isn't necessarily the inclusion of the chip itself, though, but rather the way it introduced such a new technical element without being gimmicky. *Star Fox* was a credible experience, and showed Nintendo's early skill at adapting its games to a 3D space.

ELLEN PAGE AND WILLEM DAFOE IN BEYOND

HOLLYWOOD ACTORS GET SERIOUS IN VIDEOGAMES

➜ **Year** 2013

16 The appearance of an A-list Hollywood actor is not a new phenomenon in videogames, if we venture back into the tacky past of titles like *Apocalypse*, starring Bruce Willis, or even voice cameos in movie tie-ins like the *Spider-Man* games on PS2 and the star-studded casts of many of Rockstar's games. Yet Ellen Page's casting as Jodie Holmes in the upcoming *Beyond: Two Souls* represents something new in terms of approach, as Page's performance was entirely motion-captured, with the marketing teams at Sony using effectively using the actress as the face of the game in much the same way we'd see her headlining a movie. Willem Dafoe is involved in the same way, and the commitment to casting such well-known actors really is a far cry from the days of thesps phoning it in for minor roles. As the needs of interactive storytelling demand higher quality performances, Quantic Dream met the challenge by showing how serious it was about the evolution of its interactive narrative design.

WORLD OF WARCRAFT'S ENDURING SUCCESS

THE MASTERY OF SUSTAINING AN ONLINE PLAYER BASE

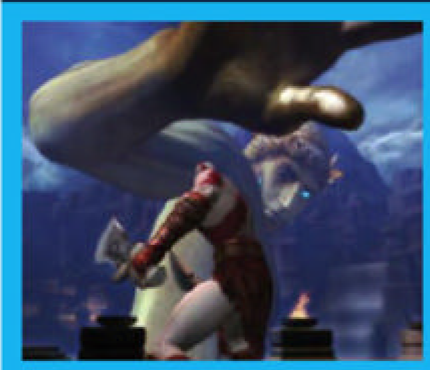
➜ **Year** 2004

17 The most typical MMO story you see going around these days involves a high-profile title's misfortune with maintaining subscriber numbers – *The Secret World* and *The Old Republic* were favourite targets in recent times. *World Of Warcraft* broke the rules by managing to renew the experience it offers players on a constant basis over the past nine years, and thereby defying the subscriber number decay that hampers many older MMOs. This response can only be attributed to strong design ideas seen in add-ons like *Cataclysm* and *Mists Of Pandaria*, which successfully drew older players back in and underlined its place in popular culture. 9.6 million subscribers might be a way off the 12 million hit upon *Cataclysm*'s release, but it's so far ahead of its competitors that the feat of keeping that number deserves a certain respect.



WHEN THE WRONG RULES ARE BUSTED

THREE INSTANCES OF RULE-BREAKING WE'RE THANKFUL WERE A ONE-OFF



GOD OF WAR II'S 'GOAT SACRIFICE'

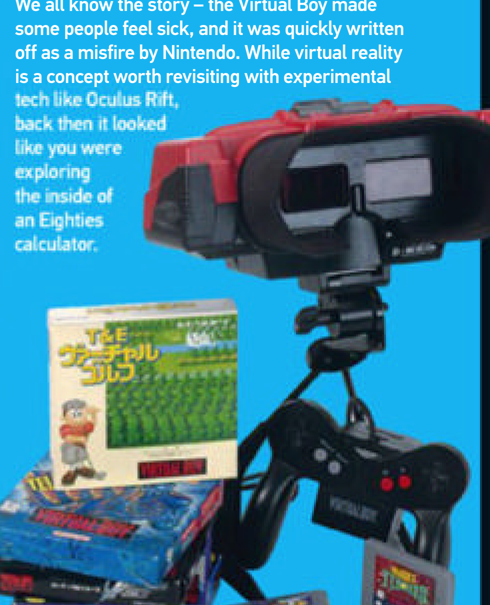
When marketing goes too far. While nonsense-pushers implied that Sony had sacrificed a goat at an event promoting *God Of War II*, the goat used on this occasion was actually dead on arrival, since it was purchased from a butcher. Either way, it's a marketing stunt we wouldn't like to see repeated.

PSP GO

Sony's download-only console was premature, and quickly found itself irrelevant on a platform where digital games weren't released as standard. Even the Vita uses physical software; the economics of a hardcore PlayStation console turned out to be very different to that of iOS.

VIRTUAL BOY

We all know the story – the Virtual Boy made some people feel sick, and it was quickly written off as a misfire by Nintendo. While virtual reality is a concept worth revisiting with experimental tech like Oculus Rift, back then it looked like you were exploring the inside of an Eighties calculator.



MINECRAFT

BIRTH OF THE 21ST CENTURY BUSINESS MODEL

→ **Year** 2009 (alpha), 2011 (full)

18 *Minecraft* is a cultural phenomenon that has inspired an entire genre of player-generated titles, yet it's the model behind its success that has broken the most rules. While selling what is essentially the alpha of a game appeared to be precarious, Notch's relationship with the *Minecraft* community made this viable, as fans' suggestions were taken under consideration as the design evolved. Naturally, giving the audience a stake in the production made a huge impact on the way *Minecraft* was perceived – truly, it's a product people feel a strong sense of ownership with, both in and out of the game, and pretenders will find that extremely hard to replicate. With 20 million sales and counting across PC, mobile editions and its Xbox 360 port, it's the poster child for creating a successful indie game in the modern age.





ACTIVISION, THE FIRST THIRD-PARTY PUBLISHER

HOW THE WORLD'S BIGGEST PUBLISHER WAS BORN OUT OF PROTEST

→ **Year** 1979

19 Regardless of your thoughts on the Activision of today, the company was originally set up as a protest against the treatment of developers in 1979. David Crane, Larry Kaplan, Alan Miller and Bob Whitehead, known informally as The Gang Of Four, wanted developer credits and royalties on their games, which they couldn't get working within the system at Atari. For those not aware, games were exclusively published by console manufacturers prior to Activision's existence, meaning that power was out of the developers' hands when it came to negotiating contracts. They split off and set up the first ever third-party publisher, changing the paradigm of development forever and ensuring that creators weren't all seen as disposable by company executives.

NINTENDO DITCHING E3 CONFERENCES

SPEAKING DIRECTLY TO A GAMING AUDIENCE

→ **Year** 2013

20 After several poorly-received E3 conferences back-to-back, where muddled Wii U branding messaging led to a confused overall perception of the new home console, Nintendo has forgone the traditional route for revealing upcoming projects and forged its own path. The Direct broadcasts allow Nintendo to create a more specific marketing message for its audience – it could be the best or worst decision it ever makes in terms of impacting the wider market, without a major conference to look forward to, yet Direct allows Nintendo to dominate social media by setting its own timetable.



GAMER MODZ.COM

CUSTOM MODDED CONTROLLERS

WIN A FREE CUSTOM CONTROLLER

1. **VISIT** www.GamerModz.com/Games
2. **CREATE** The Controller of Your Dreams
3. **SHARE** For a Chance to Win

Visit Site for Contest Details

RAPID FIRE | DROP SHOT | QUICK SCOPE | JITTER | FAST RELOAD

VISIT GAMERMODZ.COM TODAY





FACEBOOK.COM/GAMERMODZMODDEDCONTROLLERS



TWITTER.COM/GAMERMODZ

OUR PARTNERS:





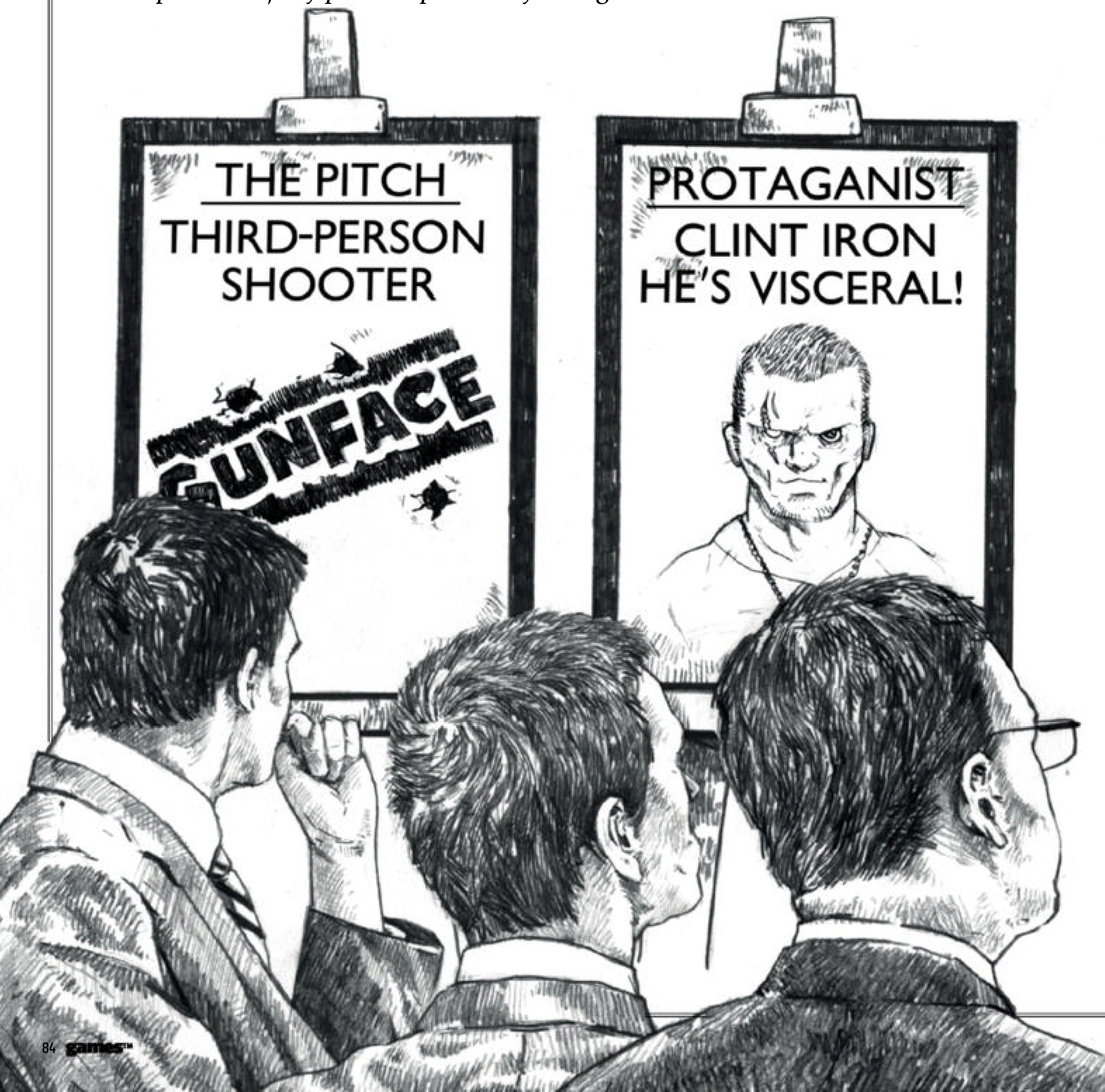




ILLUSTRATIONS BY: Kevin Scully

HOW TO PITCH A VIDEOGAME

games™ *talks to Media Molecule, Obsidian, PopCap Games and Sony's XDev studio about the trials and tribulations behind getting a game concept successfully picked up in today's tough economic climate*

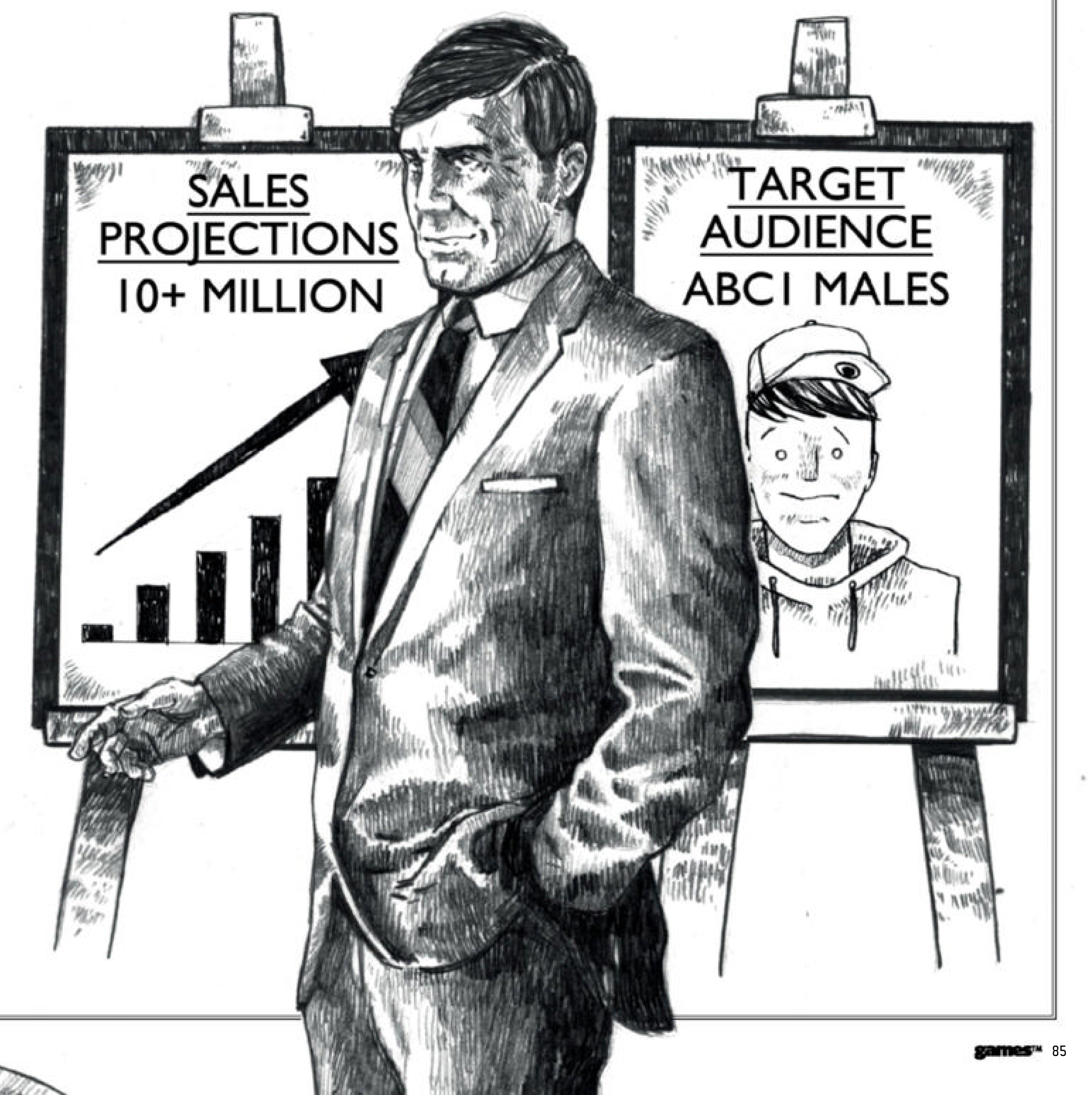


It's difficult to shake off the cliché that's come to define the videogame pitch; a scenario deeply ingrained into our collective consciousness through film, television and comedy. Amid a large boardroom sits a lengthy table, at one side a cabal of evil publishing types in $2,000 suits, at the other a lone, sweaty developer, nervously fingering through a collection of loose papers. Whatever adventurous, unique and innovative ideas this game creator has dreamed up are viciously picked apart; innovative new concepts and exciting emotional punch replaced by more guns, more explosions, and more 'pew pew'.

However, although the risk-averse economic climate does make the process of selling a publisher on strange ideas an unenviable task, the setting described above remains far removed from fact. Yes, it's an unavoidable truth that publishers constantly have one eye trained on filling the company coffers, and a quality first-person shooter is certainly one good way to go about achieving it. However, in a world where something as enigmatic as *Journey* can earn Game of the Year accolades, even the oddest of ideas will still get their chance to shine.

The videogame pitching process isn't a sinister obstacle course designed to create the most *Call Of Duty*-shaped experience possible – it's a freeform, iterative process where games ideas are born, nurtured and, ultimately, released out into the world.

"The truth is you never know what's going to be the next big thing: it's essential that you weigh up each game on its own merits or you may well miss that next *LittleBigPlanet* or *Journey*," says Pete Smith, director of product development at XDev – the team responsible for managing titles from independent development studios that are to be published by Sony Computer Entertainment





■ "When new hardware comes along we'll always look for games that maximise the features of the new console," says Smith on what Sony is looking for.

Europe. "I think that you have two approaches to new concepts: either be the same but better, or be different. I think the 'be different' route is much easier!"

In the past Smith has collaborated with studios as diverse as Quantic Dream, Media Molecule, Guerrilla Games and Ninja Theory, and currently views over 50 videogame pitches a year – a number bolstered by business conventions such as Game Connection. Selecting the best games from the bunch is a carefully considered process, but one that rarely relies on a standardised form. Pitches can come in lunchtime meetings, over the phone, in an offhand manner during a quick conversation or – yes – even in intimidating boardroom meetings.

"All concepts are different and all teams are different. Therefore, it doesn't make sense to pitch all games the same way," continues Smith. "As publishers we will ask for everything – CG movie, presentation, prototype; the works. The more you have, then the less risk there is for us. The next step is to get the publisher's attention; you shouldn't expect to sign the game after one meeting. Instead, just try and excite the publisher with the game concept and show that you have the expertise to deliver it.

"The first sign that something is right is if the concept starts a conversation. The most obvious sign that something is wrong following a pitch is silence."

It was generating that sense of excitement that Media Molecule co-founder Mark Healey was focused upon. With only an admittedly undeveloped outline for a game under his arm, Healey walked into a meeting with then-Sony top brass Phil Harrison with the aim of starting a conversation.

"We were going to the meeting with a view to getting funding for a game, but we didn't have a clue what we wanted to make, or say," he tells us. "Dave (Smith, Media Molecule co-founder) had been working on a 2D physics engine, so we had a chat, and he went away and made the Yellow Head demo (search YouTube for 'LBP prototype'). This didn't have any customisation aspects, but it did have a character that felt fun to control. We took this demo and put various slides and concept sketches into it – the idea being that we didn't want to bore Sony with another PowerPoint presentation.

"We wanted our presentation to be fun. We pitched ourselves, saying that we didn't actually know exactly what we wanted to make yet, but whatever it was, it was going to be brilliant, and we had a track record of making brilliant things, so please trust us, and give us money!"

The idea of a team pitching not only their idea, but also themselves, is something that has arisen time and time again at Sony. "I was in the original pitch for *LittleBigPlanet*, and it's fair to say the game was very different from how it ended up in its final guise," remembers Smith. "But what the (very small) Media Molecule team did so well was that they pitched themselves as well as the game. It was very clear at that point that they were hugely creative and had the potential to do something very innovative.

"Similarly, the *Heavy Rain* pitch was very different, but David Cage came across as someone who was going to challenge gaming norms and produce something different. He had a really clear vision of the experience he wanted to provide the gamer."

"We even had a publisher sell us on a pitch once, with a chance to do a Snow White RPG. We heard their take on what they were thinking, it made sense and sounded cool"
Chris Avellone, Obsidian Entertainment

Nevertheless, Sony is just one publisher – and a fairly open-minded one at that. Not every company is the same, and even if you have all the charisma of Robert Downey Jr, a genuinely intriguing core idea remains key.

"We've pitched all sorts of RPGs – action, open world, hardcore, casual, third and first-person shooters, free-to-play games in a variety of genres, and combinations



Photo's © Game Connection



■ "Focus on the visuals; they'll say more about your game that no amount of well-written text can," says Avellone. "No publisher has time to read reams and reams of text, especially when a concept piece can speak volumes."

of all of these across many different settings from post-apocalyptic to sci-fi, to time travel and more," lists Chris Avellone, designer at Obsidian Entertainment and contributor to such legendary series as *Fallout* and *Baldur's Gate*. "At some point, we reach out to someone, or they reach out to us. Usually, during this contact period, you try to settle any major obstacles that might prevent further steps as quickly as possible – timeline, team availability, release date, platform requirements, publisher aversion to a certain genre, and so on. If these don't mesh, then we move on. If there seems like there's a good foundation to move forward from the basics, then you do so."

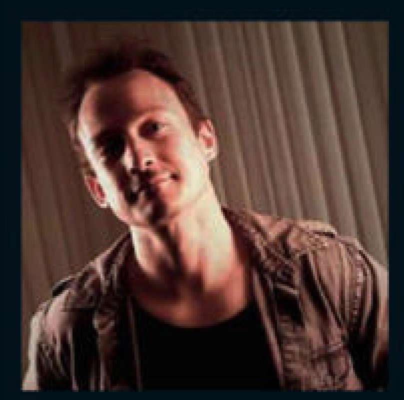
"The next steps of the pitching process really depend on the publisher, as each has a different approach, each with varying things that they value in a presentation," continues Avellone. "Some want a large number of detailed design documents, some have a strong story and character focus, others want a more visual presentation – something that reveals tone, videos, animatics and actual gameplay. Some work closely with us in developing the pitch, others take a step back and wait to see what we can do with our pitch or with an idea on their franchise to see how we would approach it. There have also been times when we've approached a studio with ideas, only to have them present other projects that they'd like us to consider in the same meeting.

"We even had a publisher sell us on a pitch once, with a chance to do a *Snow White* RPG," remembers Avellone. "We heard their take on what they were thinking, it made

■ According to Healey, one of the best skills a designer can acquire is "learning to sell your ideas", whether that's to a publisher or your own team.

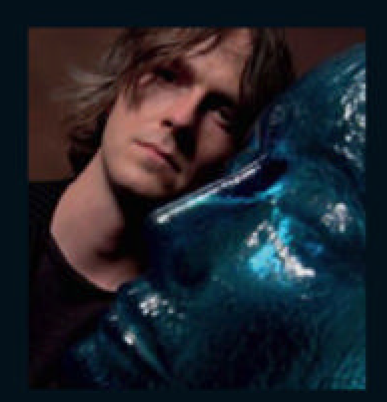
The Elephant In The Room

We asked each of our interviews about the rise of Kickstarter and pitching directly to the audience



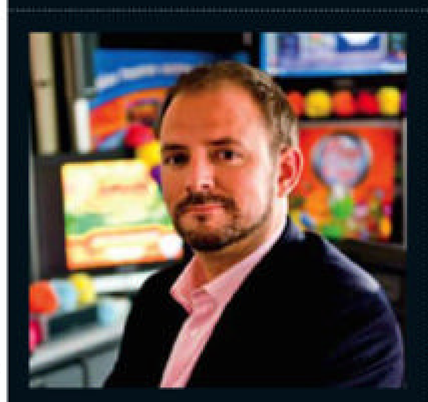
Chris Avellone, Obsidian Entertainment

■ "I LOVE KICKSTARTER. My hope is that it revolutionises the industry in two ways – one, as an alternative source of funding, and two, as a testbed for seeing successful games on Kickstarter possibly get new life and new outlets with publishers once they realise the concepts are fun and appeal to a wider range of players than they might have initially discounted, such as adventure games."



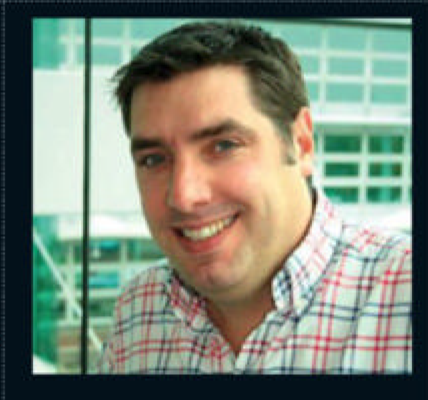
Mark Healey, Media Molecule

■ "KICKSTARTER IS A strange one. I think that it may go sour at some point though, as it's pretty obvious to me that some projects on Kickstarter don't actually need the cash they are asking for at all; they are simply using it as a marketing tool, which somehow makes it feel a bit dirty, and probably spoils it for people who are genuinely in need of cash to make their dream come true."



Jason Kapalka, PopCap Games

■ "THE ISSUE WITH Kickstarter right now is how much money goes to the established players versus the new indie players? Is it bad to suck money away from those garage start-ups, or does their higher profile bring more people into that whole crowdfunding area that it trickles down to the smaller guys as well? I don't quite know yet."



Pete Smith, XDev

■ "ANY WAY THAT a developer can get a project off the ground is a great thing in my opinion. Kickstarter is just one option. We're very flexible and work with games with all kinds of different backgrounds. Often games come in and the team has secured money from various places to get a demo done. We've never hit an insurmountable issue in this area."

sense and sounded cool. The game went into production, and while it didn't pan out, it stands out to me as one of those concepts where the execution and concept you build from the one-sentence hook is what really makes the difference."

For every game concept successfully pitched, however, there are numerous pitches that have gone nowhere. Avellone himself has had "too many projects to list" cancelled before the idea ever became anything more than just that: an idea.

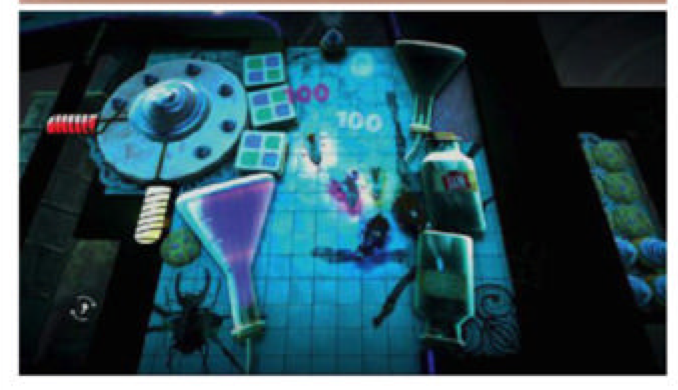
"Obsidian's successful pitch rate is low, and in my experience this is pretty standard across the industry," he tells us. "It's not unusual for some companies to have done anywhere from 20-30 pitches that are put in the 'shelved' folder and are never developed. One of the problems that can surface is when the publisher and developer can't agree on a budget, or if the logistics are out of scope for the studio – Obsidian would be unlikely to take on an MMO, for example. Some projects would simply require that they be done in a time-frame too quickly for us to do properly, or the ramp up time is too steep to hire all the necessary personnel in the time provided.

"Publishers can nay a pitch early on, and usually it's welcome – sometimes the most polite thing a publisher can do is let you know as soon as possible that they're not interested in dating you. It saves so much time in the long run."

Even if a game does manage to make it through the pitching process, and the developer bites on whatever ideas are dangled in front of them, the game that comes out on one end of the production line rarely resembles that which was originally put in. It's important to emphasise, however, that this isn't an evil process of design by way of marketing, but a collaborative process where developers and publishers work in tandem to discover what works in the original pitch, what doesn't, and what should become the core pillars of the title. It becomes a creative evolutionary process stemming from an original idea.







"*LittleBigPlanet*, *Journey*, *Heavy Rain* and *Unfinished Swan* are all great examples of concepts that could have been considered risky, but were signed by Sony and are now hugely successful titles," says Smith.

"At the end of the day we want the game to be great, and anything we can do to help that, we will do," says Smith of XDev's influence on the games it greenlights. "We are often working with developers for months before anyone but the production team sees the game, so we have lots of time to improve and refine the initial concept.

"However, we tread a fine line. We want to make sure that the game is a good strategic fit, but most importantly we want the team to own the game and really believe in it. If we 'meddle' too much at this stage it can be a disaster, as we all want to keep what was great about the concept in the first place, and we want the team to believe in the game 100 per cent."

LittleBigPlanet is the perfect example of this balance, with the vagueness of the title's original pitch built upon by both Sony and Media Molecule. "I don't find that original stuff is easily designed upfront – new concepts and ideas are very hard to convince people of, as they have no frame of reference," says Healey. "It's more a journey that you embark on with open eyes waiting for stuff to emerge. With Sony there were multiple pitches in the sense that we would update Sony about once a month. The pitch would become more focused as we worked out exactly what we were making.

"However, there wasn't anything that Sony strong-armed us into doing at all. They really trusted us and let us get on with it. They weren't shy about telling us a particular idea was rubbish either, but we were free to ignore that and often did, although sometimes they were really spot on and provided a welcome reality check."

"We tread a fine line. We want to make sure that the game is a good strategic fit, but most importantly we want the team to own the game and really believe in it"
Pete Smith, XDev

There's a widespread misconception among the gaming community that publishers act in a very different manner to this, that the corporate bigwigs pressure developers to alter original pitches to fall more in line with an easy moneymaking strategy. Although there are likely cases of this, it's hardly the norm. Fiscal responsibility and risk mitigation is always going to play a part in the industry, but it's just sound business practice, and it doesn't necessarily immediately translate into greedy behaviour or ignorance towards untested or unfamiliar concepts.

"At the end of the day, all publishers want and need to make money. There's no getting away from that," says Healey. "That's obvious, and most developers – including lone indies – want to make money too. The thing is, so what? That's the world we live in, isn't it? The thing where you see difference, and what actually matters, is how publishers go about achieving it. Some are much more short term and opportunist, but others can see the worth in building up good relationships, trust and respect, both with developers and consumers."

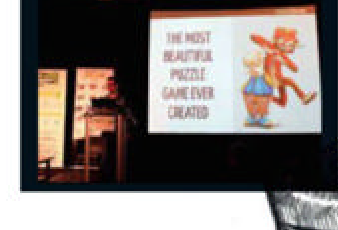
The Pitch

Chris Avellone details the pitching process at Obsidian

"AFTER THE INITIAL contact, it's your job to write a pitch document, set up a PowerPoint and if possible, animatic presentation of the gameplay and game elements. We do a draft of the game pillars, the logistics (platforms, timetable, budget), the game mechanics and scope, and then we pass it around to both our agents and all the eyes at Obsidian. Everyone at the company is allowed to see these presentation materials, and it's fine if they want to give comments or weigh in.

"We use that draft as the basis for the PowerPoint and presentation to the publisher. This is generally about a 40-minute presentation with the publisher heavies and decision makers, leaving time for questions and thoughts. Whenever possible, we try to schedule any trips that take place outside of Southern California so they loop in several publishers and different pitches to each one so we can maximise the efficiency of the trip.

"If the pitch is successful, then a long series of contract negotiations begin, although usually a serious publisher is willing to start paying for work at that stage, and that's the true acid test of any pitch: the moment any publisher is willing to spend some money on your title, that's when you should consider it a real possibility."



Jason Kapalka, chief game designer and owner of PopCap Games agrees that, while publishers certainly do rely on familiar franchises and game mechanics, this doesn't mean they're necessarily ignoring new ideas at the pitch stage.

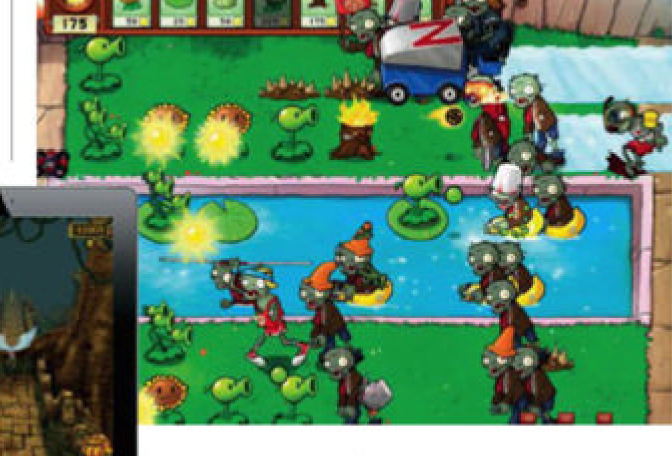
"There's some juice to the idea that publishers are conservative in that it's a tumultuous time in the games industry right now. If it were your hundred million dollars, would you put it into *Call Of Duty 7* or some crazy indie game pitch? You're doing some fairly risky gambling there with the latter.

"However, at the same time I do believe that the big publishers do recognise that there's a need for new content," he continues. "No matter how big the publisher, you often see that they are trying new stuff. Activision is a giant publisher but it's got *Skylanders*, and that was a pretty unusual experiment for them a few years ago. Publishers are on the lookout for new IP and new game types, because they recognise that the industry is changing and people want new stuff.

"It's a continual battle between those two things: how can they invest in something that they know will make their money back with versus finding the next big thing."

And that next big thing is just around the corner, with the industry now transitioning into a brave new generation of console gaming. It's going to be an interesting time to watch what new ideas publishers are willing to take a risk on. Will the trend of the loudest and most explosive games rising to the top continue, or will less conventional ideas get a chance to shine? More interestingly, will the pitching process even remain the same?

For Kapalka, an idea is not enough. "It's like sending a movie studio a two-page movie outline," he says. "If you're Steven Spielberg, then people will probably listen, but without that reputation it's almost impossible to persuade people they should take a chance on you."



Today's pitches often require developers to also offer ideas on how features such as mobile or social play can be harnessed.

With all this talk of pitches and PowerPoint slides, we're missing an important point. With the rise of self-publishing, outlets like Kickstarter (see The Elephant In The Room) and tools such as Unity, the cliché of boardrooms populated by VIP publishers and fidgeting game-makers may be gradually becoming a thing of the past. There's a power-shift occurring, and those within the industry have noticed.

"It's getting to that point where the tools for the production of games are cheap enough that you don't really need to pitch a game necessarily," states Kapalka. "The industry is no longer this big fortress where you have to apply to make it in. If you want to make games then make a game. That's the best calling card you could have."

Healey agrees. "We're currently going through a self-publishing revolution. If I was to enter the Wild West again, I would concentrate on making something that I love, get some visibility online, and then wait for publishers to come and pitch to me.

"It isn't about the pitch anymore. It's about how to sell something that's already finished."



games™ SUBSCRIPTIONVOUCHER

☐ YES I would like to subscribe to games™

YOUR DETAILS

Title________ First name________

Surname________

Address________

Postcode________ Country________

Telephone number________

Mobile number________

Email address________

Please complete your email address to receive news and special offers from us

DIRECT DEBIT PAYMENT

☐ **UK Direct Debit Payment**

I will receive my first three issues for just £1, I will then pay only £21.00 every six issues thereafter. If, however, I do not love what I see, I can cancel at any time.

Instruction to your Bank or Building Society to pay by Direct Debit

Please fill in the form and send it to: games™ Subscriptions Dept, 800 Guillat Avenue, Kent Science Park, Sittingbourne ME9 8GU

Name and full postal address of your Bank or Building Society

To: The Manager Bank/Building Society

Address

Postcode

Name(s) of account holder(s)

Branch sort code

Bank/Building Society account number

Originator's Identification Number

5 0 1 8 8 4

Reference Number

Instructions to your Bank or Building Society
Please pay Imagine Publishing Limited Direct Debits from the account detailed in this instruction subject to the safeguards assured by the Direct Debit guarantee. I understand that this instruction may remain with Imagine Publishing Limited and, if so, details will be passed on electronically to my Bank/Building Society

Signature(s)

Date

Banks and Building Societies may not accept Direct Debit instructions for some types of account

A6 instruction form

PAYMENT DETAILS

YOUR EXCLUSIVE READER PRICE, ONE YEAR (13 ISSUES)

☐ **UK: £52.00 (Save 20%)** ☐ **Europe: £70.00**

☐ **World: £80.00**

Cheque

☐ I enclose a cheque for £________

(made payable to Imagine Publishing Ltd)

Credit/Debit Card

☐ Visa ☐ MasterCard ☐ Amex ☐ Maestro

Card number Expiry date

Security number (last three digits on the strip at the back of the card)

Issue number (if Maestro)

Signed________

Date________

Code: PCG136 ☐ Tick this box if you do not wish to receive any promotional material from Imagine Publishing Ltd ☐ Tick this box if you do not wish to receive promotional material from other companies. Terms & Conditions apply. We publish 13 issues a year, your subscription will start from the next available issue unless otherwise indicated. Direct Debit guarantee details available on request. This offer expires without notice.

I would like my subscription to start from issue:

Return this order form to:

games™ Subscriptions Department, 800 Guillat Avenue, Kent Science Park, Sittingbourne, ME9 8GU or email it to gamestm@servicehelpline.co.uk

You will be able to view your subscription details online at www.imaginesubs.co.uk



FANTASTIC SUBSCRIBER OFFER

Subscribe today and get your first three issues for £1

- Pay only £3.50 for every future issue – a 30% saving on the store price
- Free UK delivery to your door
- Never miss an issue
- Money-back guarantee

Terms & Conditions

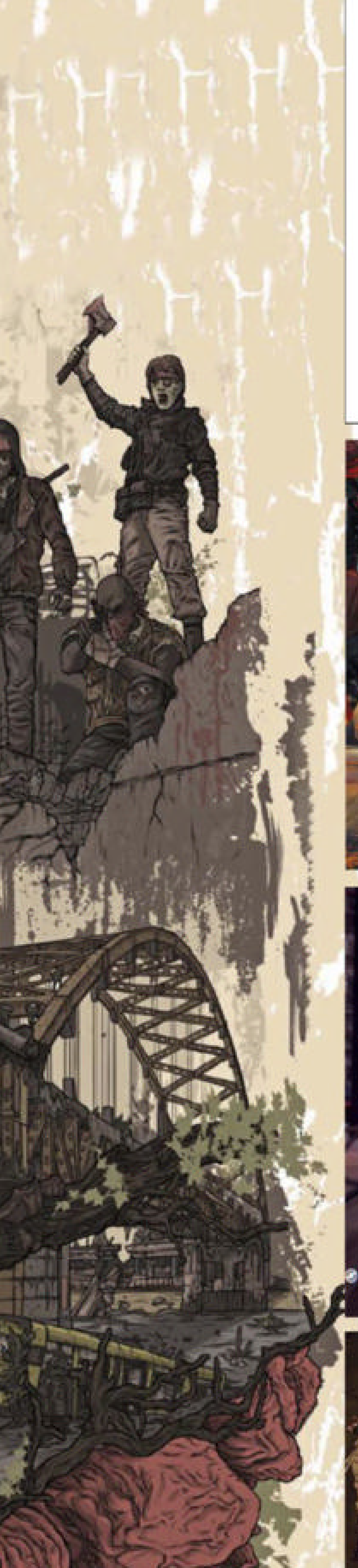
This offer entitles new UK direct debit subscribers to receive their first three issues for £1. After these issues, subscribers will then pay £21.00 every six issues. Subscribers can cancel this subscription at any time. New subscriptions will start from the next available issue. Offer code PCG136 must be quoted to receive this special subscription price. Details of the Direct Debit guarantee are available on request. Offer expires 30 September 2013. Imagine Publishing reserves the right to limit this type of offer to one per household.
Source Code PCG136 Web address: www.imaginesubs.co.uk/gtm
Tel: 0844 848 8429

Reviews



94
The Last Of Us

Naughty Dog's Uncharted successor is a haunting post-apocalyptic vision



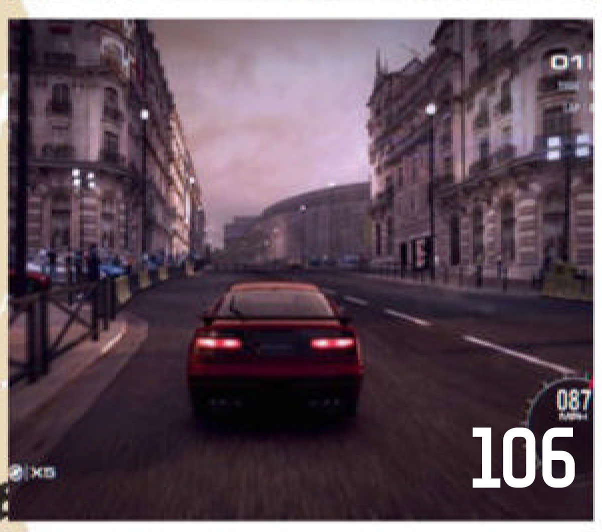
THE AVERAGE

Three of the numbers in a ten-point scale are of greater importance than the others: five, seven, and of course, ten. Some publications would fool you into believing that a 7/10 game is average, but that just doesn't make sense to us. **games™** reviews videogames on their entertainment value, and so any title that simply performs to an adequate standard will receive a 5/10. Simple. The elusive ten is reserved for games of incredible, irrefutable quality, but please be aware that a score of ten in no way professes to mean perfection. Perfection is an unattainable goal, and on a ten-point scale nothing should be unattainable. Again, simple. Our reviews are not a checklist of technical features with points knocked off for flaws, neither are they a PR-pressured fluff-fest – we'd never let that happen, and besides you'd smell it a mile off. And finally, the reviews you find within these pages are most certainly not statements of fact, they are the opinions of schooled, knowledgeable videogame journalists, designed to enlighten, inform, and engage. The gospel according to **games™**.











110

AGREE/DISAGREE?

games™ is always right. But that doesn't stop some people disagreeing. Think we've got a review horribly wrong? Or have we nailed it?

Let us know through the following channels:


facebook.com/gamesTM


@gamesTMmag
#gamestmiswrong #gamestmisright

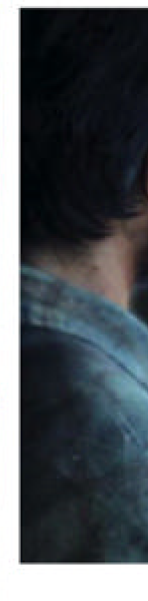

gplus.to/gamesTMmagazine

JOEL IS AS MUCH OF A KILLER AS NATE DRAKE, BUT HE'S NOT CRACKING WISE IN CUTSCENES AFTER DOING THE DEED

WHICH CRAFT

The Last Of Us is ostensibly an action game, but pulls in appropriate and relevant RPG systems that suit the story and the action. The most consistent of these is the game's simple but rewarding crafting system, that lets you build medikits, shivs, molotovs and a few other surprises from assorted crap you find lying around. The system's genius comes in two guises – firstly, many of the resources overlap (and are always in short supply), meaning you frequently have to choose between offensive and defensive options. Molotovs and med kits, for example, use the exact same stuff to craft, making each decision crucial. Secondly, it's all done in real time, so you're never given a breather. For such a linear game, *The Last Of Us* constantly asks the player questions about how they want to play.







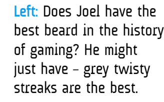
Left: Does Joel have the best beard in the history of gaming? He might just have – grey twisty streaks are the best.

NEXT GEN? WHAT NEXT GEN?

The Last Of Us*

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation 3
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Sony
DEVELOPER: Naughty Dog
PRICE: £49.99
RELEASE: JUNE 14
PLAYERS: 1
ONLINE REVIEWED: NO



If art reflects the society in which it's created, then we should probably worry about the sheer volume of apocalyptic drama that's dominating modern media. From *The Walking Dead* to *The Road* via *Fallout* and now *The Last Of Us*, this recent fascination with decaying societies, rampant human destruction and devastating disease isn't a particularly subtle representation of the perceived state of Western living. And it's providing some of the most thoughtful and considered writing and storytelling in any kind of fiction.

Jumping straight to the premier league of this fictional trend, then, is Naughty Dog's outstandingly bleak *The Last Of Us*. This is the studio's first venture outside of the technicolour world of *Uncharted* for some eight years, and you'd be forgiven for thinking it might step tentatively into new territory. The reality is anything but – *The Last Of Us* is an astonishingly brave but lavish production; a big-budget and big-ideas marriage of world class storytelling and fierce action that will now surely cement the creators of *Crash Bandicoot* as masters of their craft. Simply put, *The Last Of Us* is astounding.

It begins with a bang, too. While the opening hour is light on traditional action, it feels like Naughty Dog flexing its stylistic muscles. A heady blend of gameplay, cutscenes and pure drama, it places you directly in the middle of the apocalypse, letting you experience the sheer terror and confusion for yourself, before ending as abruptly as it begins. Truly powerful stuff.

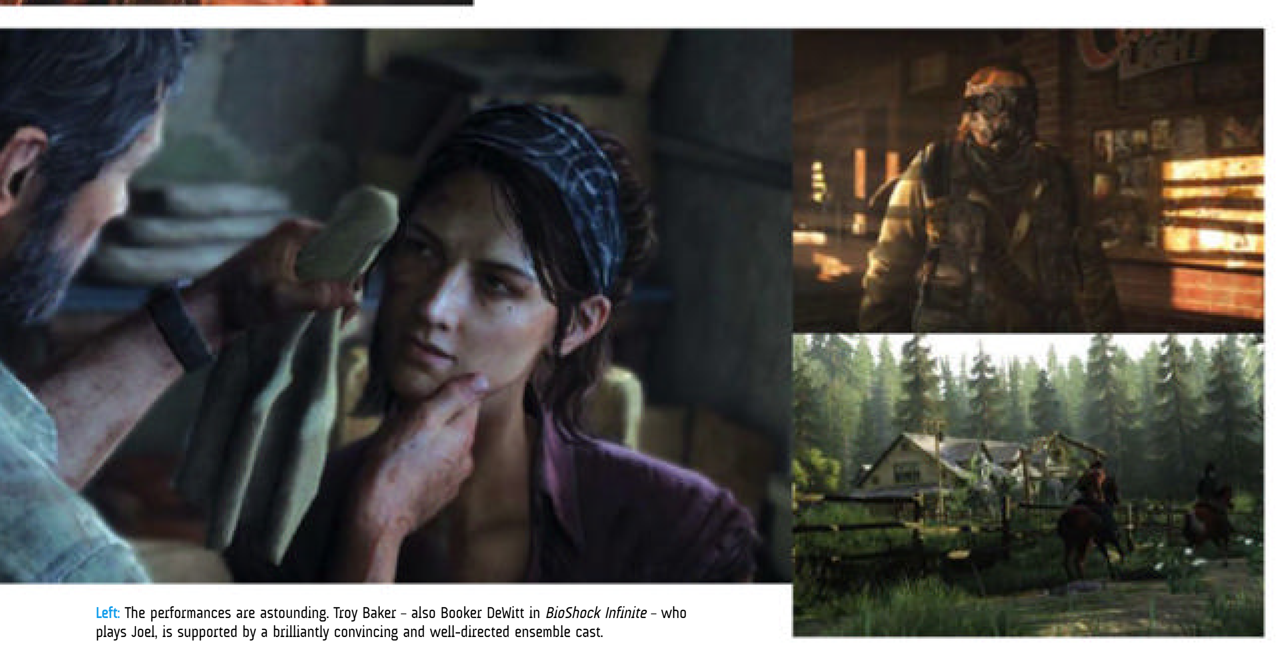
The easy route then, narratively speaking, would have been to continue directly from there, but *The Last Of Us* instead moves the action a whole two decades forward, and while it uses minimal exposition to explain what has happened and how it has affected the world, you can fill in the gaps yourself.

Playing as Joel, a man in his late forties or early fifties, a man with a speckled grey beard and world-weathered skin, who has lived

ENHANCED

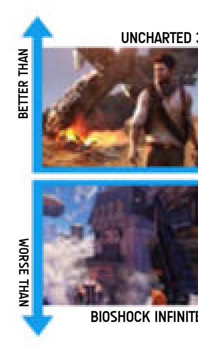
IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

UNCHARTED: Of course *TLOU* isn't a sequel to *Uncharted*, but it shares plenty of DNA. Narratively, though, this is much more consistent than Drake's adventures – no ludonarrative dissonance here.



Left: The performances are astounding. Troy Baker – also Booker DeWitt in *BioShock Infinite* – who plays Joel, is supported by a brilliantly convincing and well-directed ensemble cast.

Left: Who are worse, the infected or the humans? It's a familiar apocalyptic question, but rarely has it been handled so well.



through it all and seen even more, your journey through this lengthy, sprawling adventure is as much about what happens as it is about what has already happened. It's quickly established that Joel is a smuggler, and lives in a quarantined zone of Boston. His latest project – smuggling a young girl called Ellie out of the zone and to the mysterious anti-government group The Fireflies. And in order to do so, he'll be accompanied by his partner, and is-she/isn't-she girlfriend, Tess.

That's where the story begins, but that's most certainly not where it ends. For its 16 hours (and that's a proper 16 hours, played mostly on Hard but finished on Normal), *The Last Of Us* takes players across the country and through an entire year, across all manner of stark, broken down locations and even more broken down people along the way.

During that time, you'll bond with the marvellously well-written cohort Ellie, although Joel is a far more reluctant and unrepentant character than we're used to in gaming. It's been 20 years since the breakout of the infection 9a Cordyceps strain that affects humans, turning them into cannibalistic zombies and eventually disgusting, spore-spewing abominations that line the floors and ceilings of the world's more unpleasant dwellings. And in those 20 years, Joel and the rest of the game's characters have had to acclimatise to a world where the rules just aren't the same as they once were, and where death and killing are simply part of the fabric.

It's why Joel doesn't flinch when he first chokes out an assailant – this isn't his first rodeo. It's the reason he's still around. It also means that *The Last Of Us*' gameplay (which, fear not, still makes for the vast majority of the experience) ties into its narrative far more successfully than Naughty Dog's jarring but wonderful *Uncharted* games. Joel is as much of a killer as Nate Drake, but he's not cracking wise in cutscenes after doing the deed.

And those deeds are pretty regular. *The Last Of Us* trades in a stealthier approach to action, but it's action nonetheless. Whether you're struggling against the infected, the military or bandits, you're not going to get very far without putting a few bodies in the ground. However, with ammunition and supplies in short shrift, you simply cannot go out guns blazing and play the game like an ordinary shooter. Joel is too fragile, for one, and you'll run out of bullets before you can say 'mushroom-headed guy chewing out your trachea'.

So, *The Last Of Us* asks you to tread carefully, to use Joel's focused hearing to scope out enemy positions and movements, to scavenge for supplies that you can then craft into offensive and defensive tools. You're both the hunter and the hunted, strangling human enemies or tiptoeing past infected as you perilously creep en route to whatever exit or beacon of hope the game skilfully directs you towards. It's gameplay that has been done before, but the beautiful animation and oppressive, tense atmosphere elevate it above your usual stealth fare.

Just as death is inevitable, though, so too is discovery. *The Last Of Us* makes stealth hard and accidents easy, and the real game happens after you've been spotted. This is where the combat systems really come into play, where the choices you've made in your crafting (see boxout), your current loadout and your sheer

FAQs

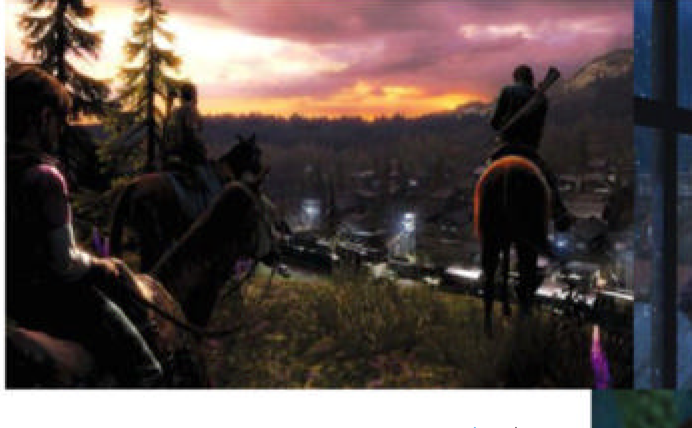
Q. BETTER THAN UNCHARTED?
They serve different purposes, but *The Last Of Us* is a more tonally successful and intelligent game than any of Drake's adventures.

Q. DO WE NEED PS4?
Apart from a few jagged edges, *The Last Of Us* is absolutely stunning. The PS3 still has some grunt.

Q. IS IT SCARY?
It doesn't rely on jump scares, just an awful sense of dread and foreboding, spiked by terrifying panics.



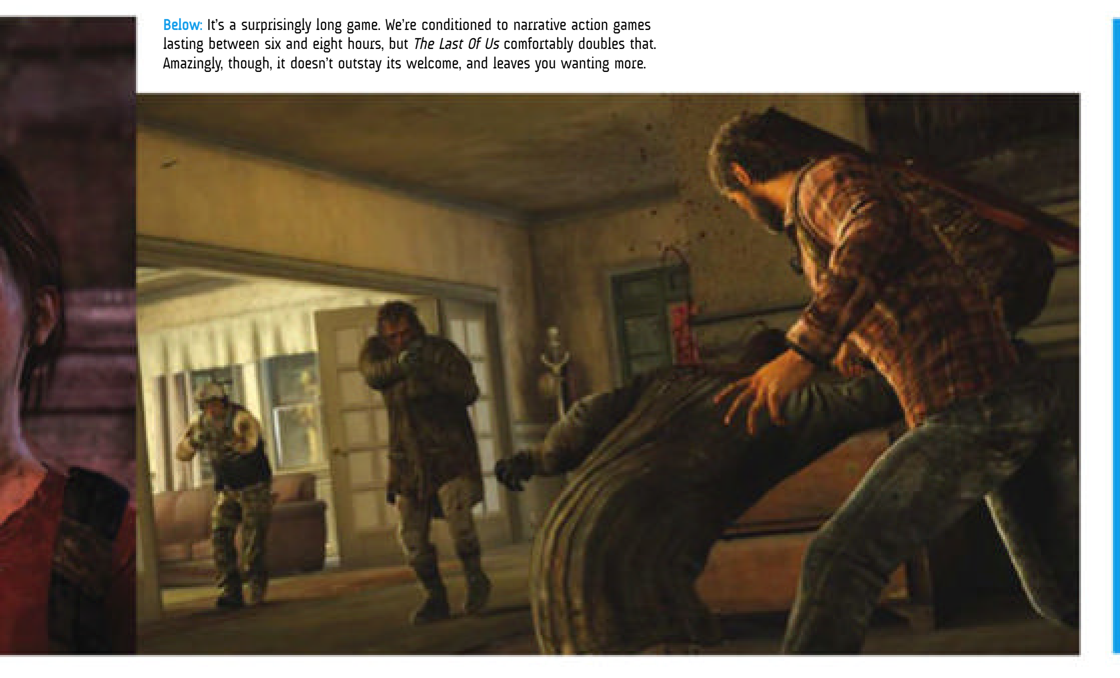
Right: It's an amazing looking game. Current PC efforts may have higher resolutions, but *The Last Of Us* combines artistry, astounding detail and world-class animation to create something almost peerless. Only some aliasing issues dampen the beauty.



Above: There are a few gameplay surprises along the way – as soon as you start to feel comfortable, the game flips the script.

YOU'LL RUN OUT OF BULLETS BEFORE YOU CAN SAY 'MUSHROOM-HEADED GUY CHEWING OUT YOUR TRACHEA'

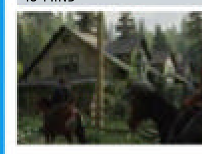
Below: It's a surprisingly long game. We're conditioned to narrative action games lasting between six and eight hours, but *The Last Of Us* comfortably doubles that. Amazingly, though, it doesn't outstay its welcome, and leaves you wanting more.



TIMELINE HIGHLIGHTS

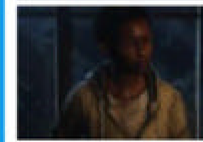
THE BEST BITS IN THE GAME AND WHEN YOU CAN EXPECT TO SEE THEM

40 MINS



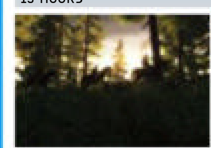
A stunning opening, blending cut-scene, action and drama like little else. It'll surprise you, so discard any friends who try and spoil it for you. It's fantastic stuff, really.

2 HOURS



The pace has slowed and the systems are slowly coming together one by one. Things are just about to get going, however – the pacing is pretty relentless from here on in.

15 HOURS



What a journey. It's a long game but paced beautifully, with so many memories both beautiful and horrendous. A masterpiece, and a great sign-off for the PS3 hardware as well.



LISTEN IN

The most 'unrealistic' element of *The Last Of Us* is Joel's ability to see through walls. Narratively, it's justified by his ability to 'focus hear', but in action it allows you to process the position and movement of guards briefly before returning to normal action. It's a vital tool, though, as the lack of other stealth parameters (no light meters, no vision cones, no detection alarms) means you do need a little bit of help if you do want to stay out of harm's way. Not that you'll be able to stay hidden for long – this isn't *Dishonored*. The inevitability of discovery is one of the game's key tensions.

ingenuity must all team together in order for you to survive. Bullets hurt in this game – Joel can only take a few shots and so can his enemies, and there's no recharging health.

This results in frantic, gruesome melees that often end in a pile of bodies and the heart-pounding knowledge that you survived by the skin of your teeth. And that's just against the human opponents. One memorable encounter saw Joel and Ellie being spotted by a lone guard inside a decrepit hotel. Joel missed with his bow and arrow, but Ellie (AI controlled, brilliantly for the most part) hurled a brick at the assailant's head, giving Joel enough time to charge him, smash his head into the far wall, and grab his shotgun before being set upon by his friends. A mad dash to cover and seclusion later, and the encounter morphed into a predatory hunt, with Joel picking off his foes one by one before leaving his final victim in a hysterical state. And then very, very dead.

You rarely have to deal with human enemies and the infected at the same time (for the entirely believable reason that humans wouldn't hole up in an infected zone), so when you do work against the infected, the tone shifts significantly. They come in two main forms – Runners (think *28 Days Later*) and Clickers (think hell on earth). Runners are typical zombies – they can see, they sprint towards and overwhelm you, and require quick and deliberate action. Clickers, though, are different. They can't see, and instead use a horrendous clicking sound as an echolocation. If they grab you, it's instant death. They can't be strangled and they're very resilient to bullets. When there are Clickers about, you have to move silently and with extreme caution, otherwise you're going to die. Nastily.

Again, none of these systems are particularly groundbreaking or innovative, but the way *The Last Of Us* builds its tension and the way these scenarios often pan out (every player will have their own stories – the emergent behaviours make for amazing, gruelling and ultraviolently unique tales). But it's the relationships that really make *The Last Of Us*. It's a technical marvel, a true triple-A with best-in-show production values, but it's the beautiful combination of performance and story that elevates it clearly above the competition.

In the PS3's dying light, Naughty Dog has crafted one of this generation's true marvels. If scores are your thing, then know that this one was about as close to full marks as you can get (a few more combat options and a few less sticking points away), but regardless, like *BioShock Infinite*, this is something that will live long in the memory and even longer in the discussion. Brutal, brilliant and bleakly beautiful.

FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

PERFORMANCE CAPTURE: The acting and dialogue is superb – truly.
VIDEOGAME NASTY: Pretty damn violent, but yet it never feels gratuitous.

VERDICT 9/10

NAUGHTY DOG SALUTES THE PS3 WITH A MASTERPIECE

GLOBETROTTING FOUR-PLAYER CARNAGE

Fuse

This generation hasn't exactly been kind to new IP, and on the eve of a new wave of consoles, it's unlikely to get any easier. Insomniac Games must realise it's facing an uphill battle from the outset, so it's no surprise that the famed developer, responsible for the *Ratchet & Clank* and *Resistance* franchises, has tailored *Fuse* to a very specific corner of the market.

Quality co-operative shooters are far and few between, so players with overbearing social tendencies tend to lap up the releases with reckless abandon. Thankfully, Insomniac has crafted an immensely fun shooter, but for every AI pal you have to invite into the fray, *Fuse* quickly loses a degree of its charm.

A globetrotting adventure that invites three of your friends to bask in the glory of ridiculous weaponry, *Fuse* is tailor-made for co-operative fun, supporting four players over Xbox Live or two player same couch co-op. The enjoyment comes largely from the bombastic arsenal you will need to harness in order to slay legions of cybernetically enhanced mercenaries and behemoth robots across the eight hours you'll likely spend with *Fuse*.

Each of the four playable characters has a unique loadout that, when used in union with the other characters, creates a spectacle of violence that's far too alluring to ignore. Dalton has a defensive energy shield that emits a deadly shockwave; Izzy comes equipped with a Shattergun that crystallises enemies where they stand; Jacob can take on enemies at range with the Arcshot, a crossbow that fires fiery bolts; and Naya is able to create black holes that merge together, eviscerating anyone foolish enough to take up arms against you.

Each character will speak to what kind of player traits you traditionally exhibit. Dalton is perfect front and centre as his Mag Shield can soak bullets, allowing Jacob to get to a vantage point and snipe enemies from afar. Each character also has a range of abilities that can be upgraded as you progress through the game; killing enemies grants XP that can then be used to improve critical hits or upgrade your versatility on the field. Izzy, for example, is able to unlock a med beacon that can be thrown from a distance and will heal or revive any players in the immediate vicinity.

With four players, the action is thick and fast. Enemies pour out of every crevice of the levels, as explosive drones creeping along

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox 360
OTHER FORMATS: PlayStation 3
ORIGIN: USA
PUBLISHER: EA
DEVELOPER: Insomniac Games
PRICE: £39.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1-4
ONLINE REVIEWED: Yes



Above: Each of the four characters represent a different way to play, with tank, damage dealer and healer classes found in basic framework of each of them. Below: A classic Insomniac trait is crazy weaponry, and *Fuse* has no shortage of that. Get ready to skewer robots and condemn soldiers to a black hole nightmare throughout this entertaining adventure.

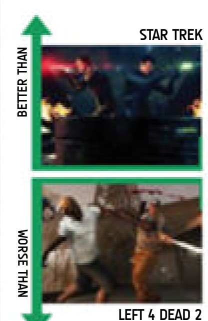




GET OFFENSIVE

While we didn't get a chance to try it out in the office, *Fuse* does also feature a Horde-style gameplay mode for competitive play. Players will go through 12 rounds of increasing difficulty as enemies flood the screen. Of course, Fuse weaponry plays a big part here as points and XP begin to flow as deadly Fuse combinations begin to flood the screen. If you're bored of working alongside your friends, this is the perfect venue to get competitive and race for the number one position. Echelon Mode has four gametypes, from free-for-all to plays on the standard capture and defence modes, it certainly adds a different flavour to the gameplay.





walls; deadly snipers fly above and invisible assassins stalk the shadows. *Fuse* isn't afraid to utilise the verticality of its levels to challenge your shooter skills. Thankfully, the Fuse weaponry is volatile when crossed, and the real fun begins when crazy scenarios begin to unfold. Izzy is able to crystallise a bunch of enemies allowing Naya to unleash black holes around them, splintering the shards of their frozen corpses across the battlefield creating a deadly rain. There are over 60 of these combinations to be found and exploited within *Fuse*, and with some buddies it's genuinely entertaining to create a reign of terror.

Like a lot of co-op shooters, the cracks begin to show when AI gets introduced. AI-controlled partners are automatically introduced for every friend of your misfit ensemble that is absent, and while they never get in your way, they display a complete ineptitude during fire fights. They hardly utilise the Fuse weaponry, which means solo players will see an incredibly limited range of the combinations that make up much of the fun. The pathfinding often causes problems throughout as well, with AI often reluctant to push forward in a fight.

MISSING LINK

WHAT WE WOULD CHANGE

FAULTY AI: AI in co-operative games is often difficult to live with, but stronger AI would have made this a fine solo adventure.

Thankfully Insomniac introduced the ability to seamlessly switch between any available characters with the press of a button, so those with quick fingers can jump between the various soldiers and create their own Fuse-based carnage, but it's a fairly cumbersome way to get the job done. You'll eventually notice that the AI players don't level themselves up as they gain skill points, creating a meta-game as you have to manage the skills of four different characters. The difficult curve spike is immense for every absent friend, so it's often frustrating to have to baby-sit your AI brothers in arms – especially when a screen-spanning boss is firing lasers out of his hands at you.

Fuse went through a very public shift in identify, though it affected the end product less than you might think. While it debuted in 2011 as *Overstrike* with a quirky art style and plenty of tomfoolery, by the time it resurfaced as *Fuse* in 2012, with a fairly standard sci-fi graphical style and straight faced protagonists, we were a little worried. The end result, however, is that *Fuse* is just as silly as *Overstrike* was undoubtedly going to be. The plot is throwaway, but you'll quickly get invested in the characters – they are charming enough, and they wield genuinely interesting weapons that you'll be desperate to spend as much time with as possible. Insomniac continues to have a lot of fun with weapon design, and that's a key part of the appeal here.

Fuse with friends, is an immensely fun experience. Get four of your closest together, open up a party chat and get ready to romp through an entertaining campaign. In a single player capacity, however, the flaws begin to emerge. If you don't have Live or any third-person shooter fans to take up arms next to you with a second controller, then *Fuse* is still worthy of your time, but be prepared to get occasionally frustrated by a rather limited solo experience..

A GLOBETROTTING ADVENTURE THAT INVITES THREE OF YOUR FRIENDS TO BASK IN THE GLORY OF RIDICULOUS WEAPONRY

FAQs

Q. SHOULD I BUY FUSE?
Fuse is a really fun co-operative shooter, so if you have four friends eager to create some carnage, then you should definitely enjoy.

Q. WHAT IF I'M LONELY?
If you are without friends, then *Fuse* is a mixed bag. The AI is often frustrating and the difficulty curve becomes insane.

Q. WHERE WILL I GO?
Graphically, *Fuse* is beautiful and will take you to vast jungles, snowcapped mountains and to the new frontiers of outer space.



Above: A lot of the game takes place indoors, but when it lets you outside and you see the backdrops, don't be surprised if you want to pause and take a look around. Left: If you can convince four of your friends to purchase *Fuse*, then you can expect to have a lot of fun. Once the bullets start flying, you won't look back from your purchase.

VERDICT 7/10
FUN WITH FRIENDS, BUT SHALLOW WHEN SOLO

DONTNOD'S DEBUT IS OFTEN HARD TO BEAR, BUT WORTH REMEMBERING

Remember Me

Big-budget videogames as nakedly, relentlessly ambitious as *Remember Me* simply don't come around very often. The fact that it's the work of a rookie studio with something to prove is brazenly evident throughout it, and the opening two hours alone are a frankly dizzying assault of complex systems and rules, of big-budget spectacle and ground-breaking new gameplay techniques.

The fact that it doesn't end up delivering on its own early promise will be almost moot, for some: elements of it are destined to be influential, and if you possess even a fleeting interest in the evolution of videogame design, you simply can't miss it. But – and for other people, this'll be a very big but – those elements are wrapped up inside something that's punchy but serviceable at best, and agonisingly generic at worst.

For the most part, *Remember Me* is yet another lavish, danger-free climbing adventure that's regularly disrupted by hand-to-hand combat, the style of which owes something of a debt (surprise, surprise) to Rocksteady Studios' fearsomely authoritative Freeflow set-up. The ferocious monotony of the level design isn't disguised even once; if you're in a constricted area you're either walking or climbing, and if you've just set foot in a wide open space (as you do every ten to fifteen minutes) you're just moments away from an onslaught of nondescript henchmen.

But unlike the way-too-familiar platforming sequences, once you've gotten your head around the brawling it briskly becomes both arresting and taxing in the most rewarding way imaginable. This is partly down to sheer immediacy – hitting dodge will instantly kill every single one of your own attacks – and partly thanks to the ingenious customisable combo system. As you progress through the campaign you periodically unlock various different "Pressens", single-button attacks which can be assembled to form an innumerable number of bespoke melee combinations. For example, Regenerative

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS3
OTHER FORMATS: PC, 360
ORIGIN: France
PUBLISHER: Dontnod Entertainment
DEVELOPER: Capcom
PRICE: £49.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A



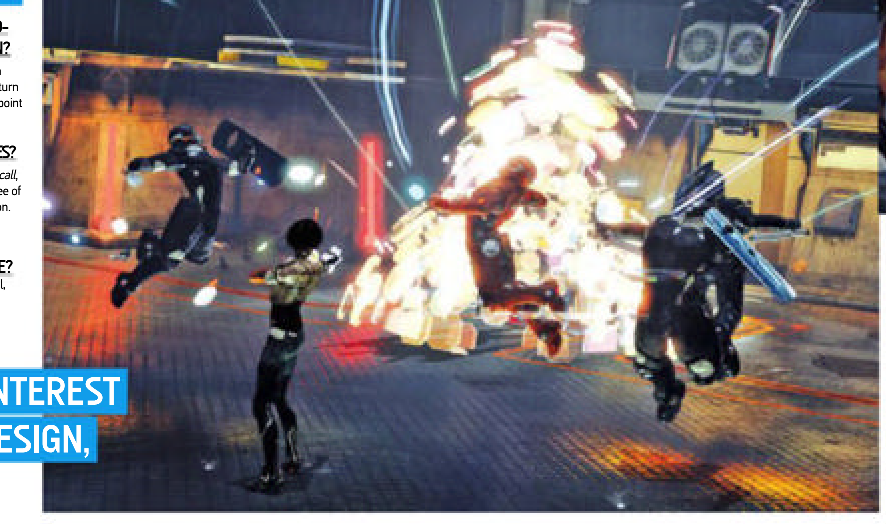
Right: Although you're never given an opportunity to explore them, the dilapidated slums of Neo-Paris are evocative and rich with detail. The same definitely can't be said for the glassy-eyed and monosyllabic NPCs that populate them.

FAQs

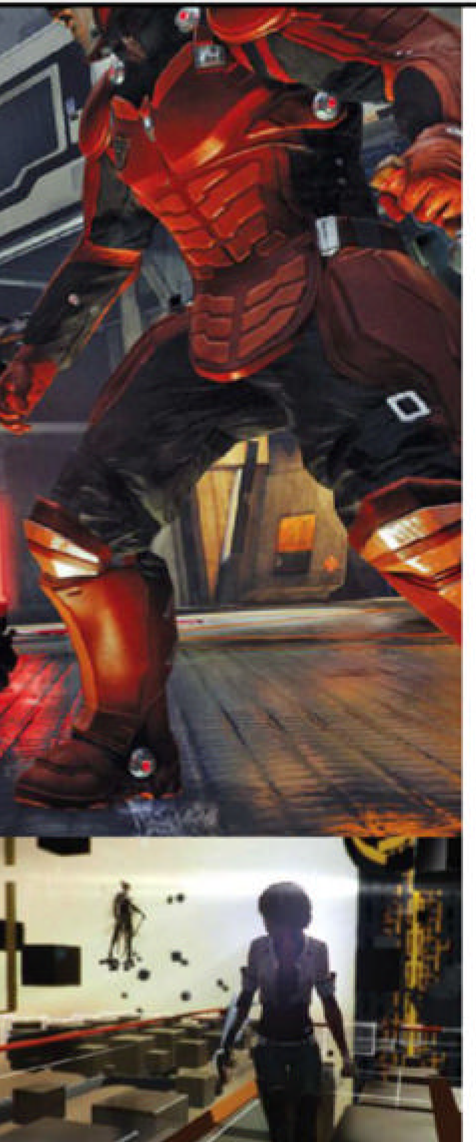
Q. IS THAT CAMILLA LUDDINGTON VOICING NILIN?
Nope, it's RADA alumni Kezia Burrows. We'd expect her to turn up in another game at some point after this.

Q. ANY MOVIE REFERENCES?
Too many to list, but *Total Recall*, *Strange Days* and *A.I.* are three of the main sources of inspiration.

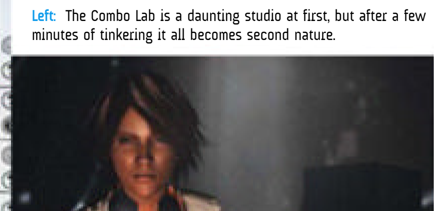
Q. HOW MANY REMIX SEQUENCES ARE THERE?
There are four of them in total, which isn't nearly enough, as they're excellent asides.



IF YOU POSSESS EVEN A FLEETING INTEREST IN THE EVOLUTION OF VIDEOGAME DESIGN, YOU SIMPLY CAN'T MISS IT



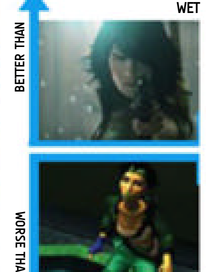




Left: The Combo Lab is a daunting studio at first, but after a few minutes of tinkering it all becomes second nature.

BETTER THAN

WET

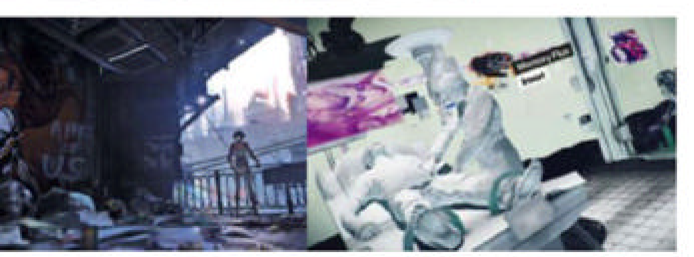


WORSE THAN

BEYOND GOOD AND EVIL

Left: Lazily, some of them need to be dispatched more than once, but the game's boss battles are almost all excellent.

Below: Three laughably obtuse and out-of-place brainteaser puzzles crop up in *Remember Me*'s final act. Thankfully, if you just spam buttons and repeatedly fail to crack them, the game pretty much just throws in the towel and solves them for you.



Pressens do less damage than regular blows but replenish your health, while Chain Pressens multiply the effect of the previous Pressen in the combo. Craft a three-hit combo that starts with two of the former and ends with one of the latter, and you've created a very valuable method of eluding death during the game's early stages.

But spamming three-hit combos will only serve you so well for so long, and this is where the turning point comes. Once you realise that you can't simply bank different combos and wait until you need them (the game's difficulty tier ranks up way too quickly for that) you'll begin modifying your combos almost constantly, even when you're slap-bang in the middle of a fervid rumble. Some fights are almost puzzle-like in structure, and to ignore the combo system is to embrace failure (and intense frustration) with wide open arms.

In addition, before long you're wielding a set of devastating S-Pressens: dynamic super moves which take an absolute age to recharge, until you build a combo that's riddled with the obligatory cooldown Pressens. If all of this sounds terribly convoluted, you can rest assured that (thanks in no small part to some very elegant menu streamlining) it genuinely isn't. In fact, the combat's only real flaw is that most enemies tend to move in large packs, and ludicrously, combos die if you lay into more than one enemy at a time.

But what *Remember Me* is destined to be remembered for is a series of startling interludes that allow you to retrospectively disrupt and "remix" other people's memories. Like tinkering with a futuristic editing suite that's powered by *Minority Report*'s ghostly precogs, these eye-popping set-pieces demand no small amount of investigative trial-and-error, and yet solving them never requires anything more sophisticated than stark, no-nonsense logic. Each remix is deliberately uncomplicated, allowing you to tinker with only a small handful of variables at any one time, and consequently they're a triumph of style and design rather than gameplay, despite the aspirations of the original vision.

That everything else in the game fails to measure up isn't surprising, but what really hurts *Remember Me* in the end is a crippling lack of focus: the thing's almost over before it finally stops throwing new gameplay systems at you. During the second act you're given a telekinesis-like power solely so that you can open a few doors with it. Some of the larger action sequences are deliberately pitched to make you experiment with Pressens; others senselessly mollycoddle you, like the boss battle that incrementally auto-saves every few seconds just in case you aren't up to the challenge. There's a brief spell where it unwisely tries its luck as a corridor shooter, and another bit where ham-fisted switch puzzles are the solitary order of business.

In short, it's a hare-brained mess. Playing through the game's flaccid mid-section is like watching tap water slowly dilute a glass of vintage red wine, and all at the gleeful behest of its own creator. But these self-conscious gameplay shifts are easily forgiven once the finale rolls around, at which point good old-fashioned overkill rears its ugly noggin: enemies multiply, skirmishes double in duration and short corridors become a distant memory. And as for the three incongruous brainteasers that pop up unannounced in the back end? Here's the polite version: they're murderously frustrating and trite.

What's most aggravating about *Remember Me* is that there's clearly a weapons-grade masterpiece buried somewhere inside it, and for all of its many flaws, it's still difficult not to root for it. Dontnod's sophomore work is now solidly anticipated. Let's hope it's still given the opportunity to create it.



SOMETHING OF A DISAPPOINTMENT

MISSING LINK

WHAT WE WOULD CHANGE

GET DEEP: Remixing other people's memories must have a devastating aftermath. What happens when that "dead" relative suddenly turns up alive in the real world? None of this is explored.

COMING UP

Remember Me is set to divide audiences, but one thing is inarguable: Olivier Deriviere's musical score is one of the great achievements of the year so far. Zipping between brassy blockbuster cues and skittish industrial noise-pop, it not only mirrors the stop-start nature of the action, but also gives the world a splash of the same brand of Gallic lunacy that so energised _The Fifth Element_; a film to which this owes a stylistic debt. However, the way Deriviere's music is used during fights is very smart. Not only are musical hints used to acclimatise you to the rhythm of the combat, long combos result in euphoric trance-style ditties which instantly make you want to perform them all over again.

CAN'T THIS TOWN GO ONE DAY WITHOUT A RIOT?

Animal Crossing: New Leaf

Animal Crossing's true home is on a handheld. As limited as 2005's DS instalment was compared to the home console versions, the convenience of dipping in and out of this life simulator on the go makes a lot more sense in the context of modern social games, which have borrowed ruthlessly from the feedback loop of *Animal Crossing*. *New Leaf* sees you installed as mayor in your new town, and, with an accompanying volley of new customisation options, it underlines the extent to which *Animal Crossing* belongs on the 3DS. It's not exactly a revamp, but *New Leaf* is a smarter game and a better fit for today's audience.

Whereas the series had creatively stagnated with Wii instalment *Let's Go To The City*, *New Leaf* successfully layers on extra customisation as you manage the expectations of an entire town, yet doesn't sacrifice the relaxed atmosphere that makes *Animal Crossing* feel so comfortable to dip into. Upon arriving in your town – we named ours Jimmins, for the purposes of this review – you take part in a tree-planting ceremony in the square to commemorate your new role as unchallenged dictator.

It's not a high-energy gig, to be honest. Houses won't catch fire if you choose to abdicate the town hall and just work on filling your house with Nintendo paraphernalia (there's a lot of it), and KK Slider won't become the victim of a heroin overdose if you can't set up a financially viable health system. It's not real-time strategy, it's classic *Animal Crossing* with a broader scope – you're saving bells and buying things, only the framework offers a better means of expressing yourself.

The advantage is, unlike the other *Animal Crossing* titles, you don't feel the heavy sense of burden that comes with your ever-expanding mortgage – though that is still a concern here – and you're not railroaded into doing boring jobs early on, either, that would typically sour you on Tom Nook's stranglehold over your new home. Indeed, in terms of accessibility, *New Leaf* makes the right shortcuts. If you're handing multiple fossils to Blathers, for example, he won't waste your time by babbling about what it is, and since Tom Nook's equally greedy nephew runs the shop separately from his uncle, you don't feel guilty about spending your bells on frivolous tat, since you're not buying stuff from your debt collector. It also progresses a lot faster.

Earning money early on doesn't take as long, and you'll find you've made your first down payment on a house, bought every available tool and picked up some turnips within a few hours. It feels like a concession to our busier, less attentive lifestyles in this modern age, so older players with less time on their hands will no doubt appreciate it; by contrast, eager players will find they get a lot more return for their time, especially when it comes to customising your town.

After your approval rating hits 100 at the start, a process that can be helpfully sped

DETAILS

FORMAT: 3DS
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: In-house
PRICE: £39.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1-2
ONLINE REVIEWED: No

Right: Seasonal events return, of course, though waiting for them is surely part of the fun in *Animal Crossing*.



Above: Characters are still as needy as ever, though they don't complain if their mayor happens to be fishing all day instead of watering the flowers.

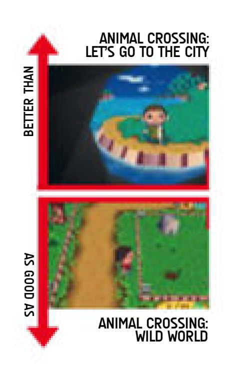




Right: You can draw your own patterns for all kinds of accessories this time, which will no doubt lead to filthy rude submissions from a certain type of player.

IT'S CLASSIC ANIMAL CROSSING WITH A BROADER SCOPE





FAQs

Q. ARE THE TOWNS BIGGER THAN ON THE DS?
Indeed. You're not building a giant province, here, but the high street is separated from the main residential district.

Q. ARE THE ABLE SISTERS STILL AROUND?
They own a two-floor property on the high street.

Q. WHERE'S TORTIMER GONE, THEN?
Retired, presumably to drop mushrooms on a private island.

THE MONEY PIT

Building extra elements in your town isn't solely the responsibility of the taxpayer, sadly. Resident animals contribute basically nothing to the development of your town, and you'll find that a lot of cash is swallowed by your changes to the scenery, as the residents merely enjoy lampposts, benches and more elaborate stuff for free, the swines. If you're a little sour about them freeloading off your hard work, though, you can tell your town hall assistant Shih Tzu Isabelle to tell off any residents for misbehaving (even if they haven't), just to make sure the animals remember who's in charge. It sounds harsh, but they simply have to learn.



up by performing odd jobs for residents and spamming the town notice board, you get permission to begin changing things like opening time parameters on shops and adding sometimes large scenic elements to the town. There's nothing bothersome to worry about, really – it's just about customising this locale to your liking, which represents the only major change to the formula. If that's something you're unlikely to engage with as a series aficionado (though that itself seems unlikely), then perhaps it's worth skipping *New Leaf*. For us, though, that extra effort to reward your self-expression is worth celebrating, and it enhances the simple moment-to-moment feeling of living in *Animal Crossing*, which is still satisfying, regardless of your age.

The animals are still hopelessly positive, even when you're sending them nasty letters featuring direct passages from *American Psycho* about playing with their blood; the population of Jimmins simply doesn't care. It's a steadfastly lovely world that offers a lot more ways to swallow your leisure time than the DS instalment. The high street expands your retail options, with Tom Nook now focusing on the obviously more lucrative world of real estate, extorting you for bells with new doors and themes for your house. Even he's less bothered about you rushing to pay off your mortgage this time around – you can't help but feel that Nintendo has taken some of the urgency out of the tasks ahead of you, which only serves to make the world you've created more inviting.

Then there are the visuals themselves, which just about outstrip the Wii version in terms of animation and fidelity. The sense of environmental depth is strong on the 3DS and the characters are a lot less creaky in their depiction, while details are a little easier to make out, like stray insects perched on plants or fossil holes in the ground.

ENHANCED
IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

SECOND-HAND MARKET: A new shop exists for the purpose of creating a flea market. It gives you another option for selling things on and picking up intriguing second-hand goods from residents.

For those that skipped *Let's Go To The City* or otherwise failed to enjoy it, *New Leaf* is the *Animal Crossing* sequel that veterans will have been hoping for, doubling down on elements that allow for genuine self-expression within this pocket universe. It's a mild revamp that counters the belief that Nintendo series are completely set in their ways. Indeed, this will offer a real pull for fans who have spent excessive levels of time gambling turnips or battering neighbours with bug nets in the past, and thankfully represents the best version of *Animal Crossing* to date.

VERDICT 8/10
A SUBTLY SMART MOVE FORWARD FOR THE SERIES

MONSTER THUMPER

Soul Sacrifice

When Keiji Inafune left Capcom, he did so after years of besmirching Japanese game development and how our Eastern cousins were continually lagging behind the West in terms of innovation, design and production. So what does his first game outside of Capcom's walls play like? Well, it's an esoteric, old fashioned combat RPG that feels like a lost relic of the PS2 era. Oh.

Anyway, it's perhaps a bit unfair to expect huge amounts from *Soul Sacrifice*. Given the absolute dearth of software on PS Vita at the moment, this has now been positioned as some sort of saviour for the console's summer, when in actual fact it's a very specific type of game meant for a very specific type of gamer. And that gamer is probably too busy playing *Monster Hunter* to even notice.

Yes, if you're used to animation-heavy combat against predictable but tough and varied enemies, then you've come to the right place. The influence of *Monster Hunter*'s weighty and precise combat can be felt throughout *Soul Sacrifice*. So much so, in fact, that there's no room for anything else.

This is a game about hitting things, then. Despite its auspicious beginnings, where you find yourself trapped in a bony cage (navigable in first person, no less) at the mercy of a powerful overlord called Magusar, you're quickly thrust into a series of short-form battles against a finite number of enemies.

From here, your sorcerer can use one of six attack spells to deal out damage – with three mapped to face buttons, and three more hidden behind a modifier activated by the right shoulder button. It's extraordinarily simple to play at a base level – this isn't intricate combat in the style of *DmC* or *Bayonetta*. And while there is a dodge and a lock on, most of the time you'll just be hitting something until it's very very dead.

Where *Soul Sacrifice* starts to come alive is in the systems hiding just beneath the surface. For all its existential oddness, *Soul Sacrifice* literally lives up to its name by giving the chance to Save or Sacrifice every enemy that you fell in battle. Simply stand over their corpse (or ghostly swirl, as it appears in game) and hold one of the two shoulder buttons. Saving will boost your HP, Sacrificing your MP. It's a simple choice, but not one that's governed by morality or that encourages you to move down a particular path. Just do whatever serves your character best.

And that's what *Soul Sacrifice* is at heart. A game about building and improving a character so he or she can get better at hitting things. Along with basic levelling, every

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS Vita
OTHER FORMATS: NA
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Sony
DEVELOPER: Comcept
PRICE: £29.99
RELEASE: Out Now
PLAYERS: 1-4
ONLINE REVIEWED: Yes



Below: Credit must go to Comcept for finally figuring out how to get the Vita's analogue sticks tuned. There's no sudden camera lurch when using the right stick – something most other Vita efforts have struggled with.



FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

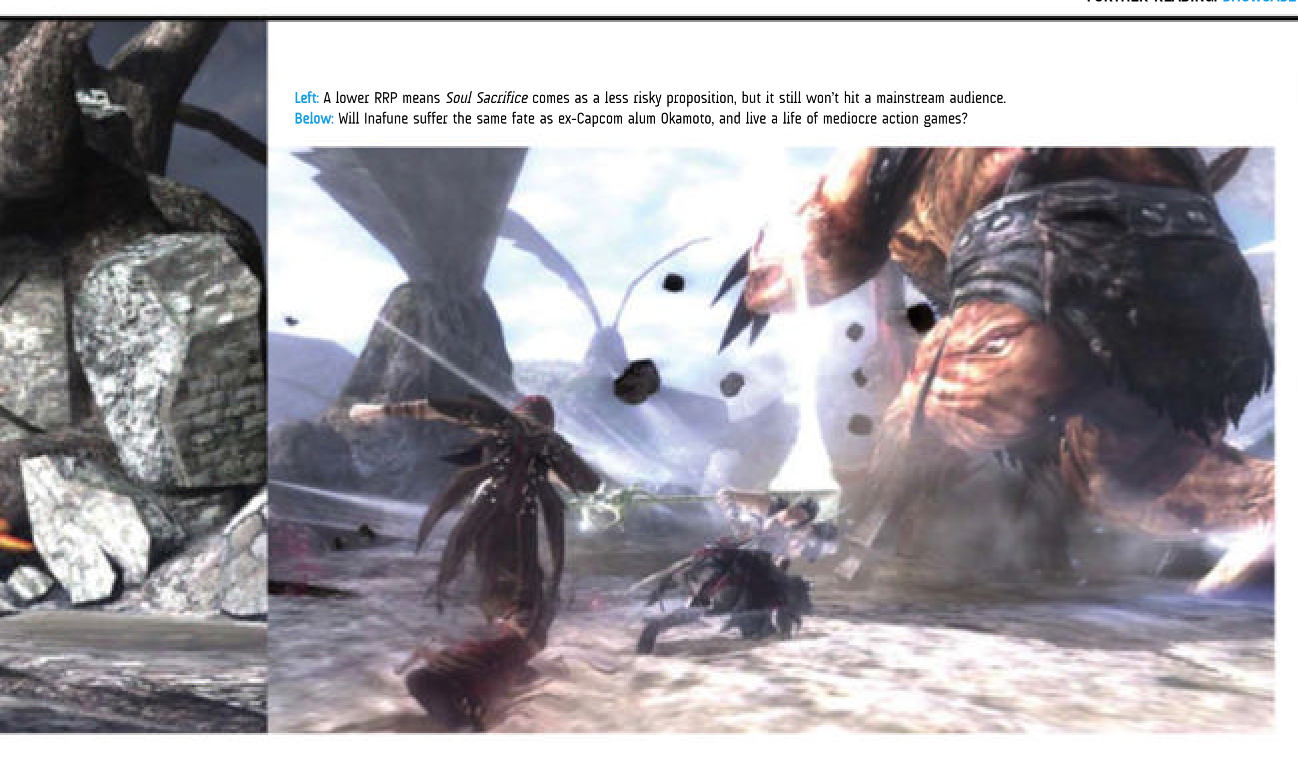
WONDERBOOK: While Librom isn't the first talking book in games, he's probably he most interesting. You can literally wipe a tear from his eye, and use it as currency.



Right: It's a better game in co-op, but you still need to find love for *Soul Sacrifice*'s simple and repetitive combat, even if you are going to play with friends. Those expecting immersion on the level of *Monster Hunter* will leave disappointed.

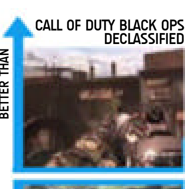
IT'LL TAKE A VERY SPECIFIC MINDSET AND PREFERENCE TO GET THE MOST OUT OF SOUL SACRIFICE

Left: A lower RRP means *Soul Sacrifice* comes as a less risky proposition, but it still won't hit a mainstream audience.
Below: Will Inafune suffer the same fate as ex-Capcom alum Okamoto, and live a life of mediocre action games?



BETTER THAN

CALL OF DUTY BLACK OPS DECLASSIFIED



WORSE THAN



MONSTER HUNTER TRI

FAQs

Q. GOOD STORY?
Poorly voiced, but well constructed and written. It plays with time and memory, and is relentlessly dark.

Q. GOOD GRAPHICS?
A smooth frame-rate and good enemy design hide the limited level design fairly well.

Q. THE VITA'S SAVIOUR?
Not quite. But you've still got *Persona 4* on this lovely system, while you wait for more software.

SOUL COLLECTIVE

Much like *Monster Hunter*, *Soul Sacrifice* is best played with chums. After plodding through the opening chapter, the Network option pops up in Librom, and you can join up to three coop partners in battle. This helps open up some of *Soul Sacrifice*'s more interesting ideas, particularly when one teammate falls in battle. The option to save or sacrifice a pal may mean the difference between success and failure, and while the battles themselves are never the hour-long slogs *Monster Hunter* is famous for, they're still fairly tense, especially during the latter stages. Sacrificing your best friend so you can beat up a vomiting cat? Sounds like as good a plan as any.



mission will reward you with a number of key drops that you can attribute to your character for the next outing. They're all spells – mostly for attacking, occasionally for defence. There are countless incantations, but quickly you realise that many are just elemental re-skins of attacks you've seen before. The first time you send a fist out of the ground is impressive – less so when it's the exact same thing, but brown this time.

It'll take a very specific mindset and taste to get the most out of *Soul Sacrifice*, because it is an extremely repetitive and mechanically unambitious game. There's no real depth or subtlety to the combat, and even though larger enemies require an innate understanding of their attack patterns and timings, there's still not a great deal of finesse here. The compulsion, if it does get its hooks in, will be in the consistent grind of harvesting new and more powerful spells and gradually crafting a sorcerer that can eventually take on Magusar and win (a battle you can attempt at any time, in a nice touch). If that's enough for you, then *Soul Sacrifice* could well win you over with its rather stylish method of storytelling too.

In that aforementioned bony cage, you meet Librom, a talking one-eyed book that acts as a bestiary, inventory and narrator. Essentially, you're reliving the memories of an older sorcerer, and altering them in real time to manipulate a favourable outcome. Of course, all of this is just window dressing for yet another mission about hitting things, but there's no denying that it's a powerful and intriguing narrative tool, and not exactly one we've seen often used.

The tales before and after each chapter are reasonably well written, if not well acted, and the whole tale is shrouded in just enough mystery to create a tangible sense of unease and malcontent. Librom himself is a bizarre English gent, albeit a book, and his teasing and prodding is reminiscent of the excellent Johnson in *Shadows Of The Damned*. He's a character that deserves a more complete and varied game, really.

Saying that, there will be people that will love *Soul Sacrifice*. It has a baseline of satisfaction to it that some will find appealing – it's not dissimilar to *Dynasty Warriors* in that respect, although *Soul Sacrifice* is a prettier, more technically accomplished effort in every way. For those who place character progression (mechanically, not narratively) above the actual verbs you use to interact with the game, then you could easily add a point or two onto the score at the bottom of the page. Just as much, though, if you're bred on clinical action games, then this will likely come off as nothing more than a slog.

Not the Vita's saviour, then, but *Soul Sacrifice* was always destined to be something smaller. A distinctly Japanese curio that will find a moderate audience, but certainly not the console-defining experience the PS Vita is still desperately searching for.

VERDICT 6/10
ESOTERIC STYLINGS BUT VERY REPETITIVE GAMEPLAY

AROUND THE WORLD IN 80 LIKES

Grid 2

You know what you're getting with Codemasters, and if you've paid attention to the racing game genre at all this generation, then you will also know that – alongside fellow UK developers Criterion – Codemasters' racing games are often the ones that raise the benchmark. It did it with the *Dirt* series, and now it's trying to do the same with its criminally overlooked *Grid* franchise – if you can call two games a franchise, that is.

That sense of familiarity seeps in earlier than usual with *Grid 2* however, with a menu system that is reminiscent of *Dirt 3*, Codemasters' *Formula One* games or indeed any game the developer has created over the last couple of years. Not to start off on a negative or anything, but *Grid 2* instantly feels as though it's been built with templates of past success in mind. But then perhaps asking for innovation from a menu screen is like asking for a better way to butter your bread.

What really matters is the racing, of course, and here Codemasters proves it knows what it is doing once more. Drifting is the name of the game here, and where *Dirt*'s semi-sim, half-arcade mechanics focused on pinpoint cornering, *Grid 2* instead relies on powering through and praying you don't damage your car too much. There's more of a jerkiness to the steering that is initially off-putting, but once its underlying rules have been quickly tamed you'll be racing through the streets of Paris and pulling off 90-degree turns at 100mph without a care in the world.

It's all part of the bombast that *Grid 2* intends to impart but, sadly, fails in the places you'd expect it. Perhaps this is the real flaw of *Grid 2*'s menu system; it may let you half-navigate increasingly affluent garages, but it lacks any of the punch or atmosphere that came alongside *Dirt 2*'s festival vibe. The tracks themselves don't feature much of the spectacle we've come



DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox 360
OTHER FORMATS: PC, PS3
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: Codemasters
DEVELOPER: Codemasters Racing
PRICE: £39.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1-12
ONLINE REVIEWED: No



Below: The game is presented as though it's a documentary on the WSR's rise to fame, which explains the YouTube-style pixellation each time you crash.

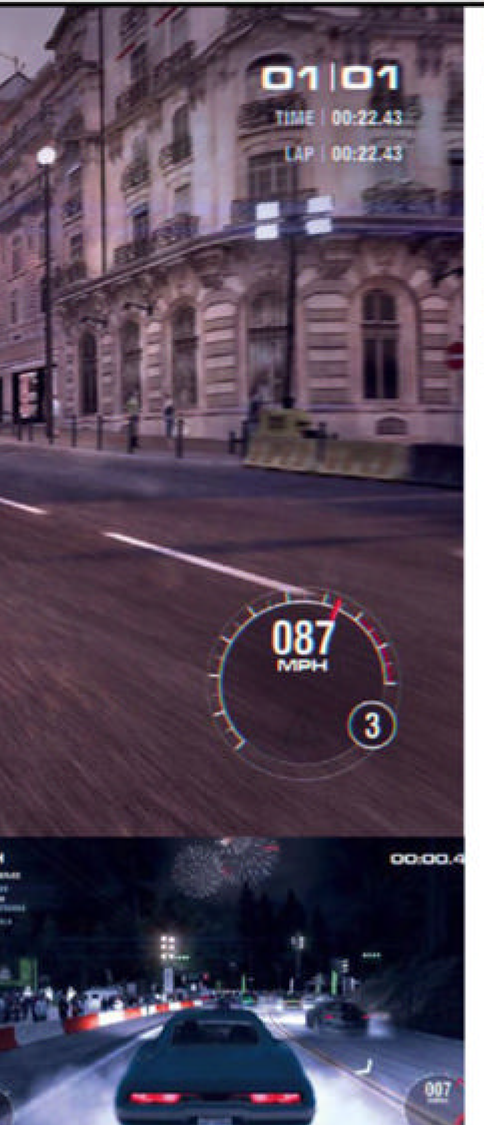
FAQs

Q. DECALS?
You'll get sponsors and a selection of decal designs, but the actual positioning is very limited.

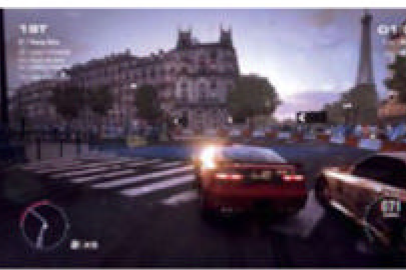
Q. SELECTION OF CARS?
You'll start off with aggressive muscle cars, but once you move to Europe and beyond you'll get more than just drifting machines.

Q. IS RACENET JUST AUTOLOG?
Yes and no. You won't get compulsive reminders, but you can get challenges worldwide. It won't be as compulsive, however.







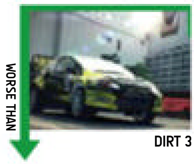


Left: The new Overtake mode isn't a new concept, but it's entertaining nonetheless. The trick is to bypass traffic without hitting anything at all; manage that and you're onto a winner.

BETTER THAN

NEED FOR SPEED: THE RUN

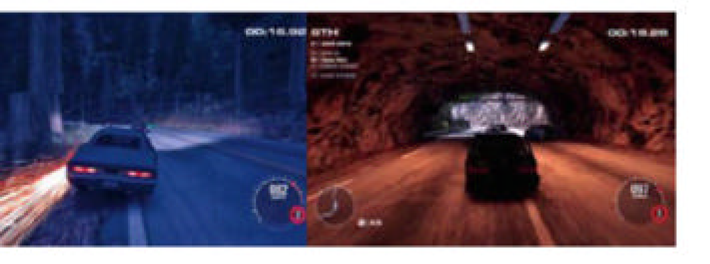




WORSE THAN

DIRT 3

Left: There are three types of tracks in *Grid 2*: cities, rural and traditional track racing. The style of racing doesn't really differ, but Codemasters has done a great job of making each location feel different.



ROUTE PLANNER

LiveRoutes are the big deal here, but sadly they don't really feel like the important addition they're made out to be. The idea is simple: rather than having a strict track layout, you'll encounter shifting corners, meaning you won't know whether to turn left, right or continue straight ahead. It's an interesting new feature that means you'll see a lot more of these detailed cities, although it doesn't provide the challenge you might expect. While each turn change is implemented smoothly, it's so smooth that you'll have plenty of time to react to whatever change has happened. It mixes things up, certainly, but for no noticeable reason.

to expect from Codemasters' recent racing output either, though the emphasis here really is on the punchy nature of its driving. In races of up to 12 players, you will find it impossible not to unfairly bash your way around corners from time to time, and the heavy use of Flashbacks that come with it – you're as likely to get derailed from the racing line as your opponents. This isn't a racing game for those who care about what tyres their car is wearing, how many cylinders you're packing or even how expensive your future hunk of bent metal is to repair. Simply jump in and race.

There's plenty of variety accompanying the game, too. Though your collection of cars increases gradually, there's enough to at least give you a choice of preference. You don't buy cars though; instead you pick from one of two, with the remaining vehicle then left to be won at a future race event. It's pleasing to get the option, naturally, but it all feels a little bit clinical. In fact, this is a wider problem with the career mode itself; you race to increase the popularity of the World Series Racing in a bid to become the world's de facto racing event. What that amounts to is an arbitrary number depicting your 'fans', which cumulatively increases as each event is ticked off, albeit with no real input from yourself. Sure, placing first scores more fans than second and third, but this is a racing game – why would you ever settle for second or less?

Though you'll head through different regions of the world through the five seasons on offer, you're still visually limited to the set of races put in front of you. Invitations come as you reach milestones of fan numbers, and you won't necessarily need to complete all of them to progress further into the career. It's not much different to any other Codemasters racer in the past few years, truth be told, but the way it's handled makes it feel like little more than a checklist of race events.

ENHANCED
IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

SLIP AND SLIDE: Times have changed since *Race Driver: Grid*, so it's only fair that *Grid 2* improves on the original's 'slippyness'. No more will you find your car's tyres failing to grip.

The saving grace comes in the form of *Grid 2*'s eclectic mix of race types. While you will witness the genre staples of Elimination, Time Trials and Duels, there are also interesting new modes such as Overtake, Endurance and LiveRoute. They're nothing extraordinary, and won't surprise racing game experts, but they add into a mixed bunch that helps wipe away that feeling of repetition. The problem is not the events themselves, then – they're fun, that's all you could ask for – but instead the game's competition. While the likes of *Need For Speed: Most Wanted* and *Forza Horizon* prove that there can be new ways to present a racing game's single-player career, it just highlights how, well, *traditional Grid 2* feels.

Die-hard racing game fans won't feel too disappointed with what is on offer here, and nor should anyone else really, for that matter. *Grid 2* improves on everything that its predecessor started, and for that reason at the very least it should be praised. Its perfect pitch between the necessary precision of *Dirt* and the arcade nature of the original *Grid* means that it effectively caters for absolutely every grade of gamer, but in some ways it does feel like it's a game that has been developed on autopilot.

So is it enough for *Grid 2* to just be a great racing game? For many of you, the answer will be yes. But it would be remiss of us to not to point out that the game doesn't really push either Codemasters or the racing genre in any particularly new direction, and from such a talented developer that's a shame. There's plenty of content to get through, however, and on a mechanical level it is the perfect blend of arcade and simulation, but ultimately we need a little more for it to be a must-have racer.



VERDICT 8/10

POLE POSITION, PERHAPS, BUT NEEDS TO PIT STOP SOON

JURASSIC LARK

Far Cry: Blood Dragon

Below: Rather than tackling one of the titular reptiles that prowl the island head-on, a much wiser tactic is to bait the prehistoric beasts to kill your enemies. If you're feeling brave, there's an achievement for killing every blood dragon.



You'd be easily forgiven for thinking that *Far Cry: Blood Dragon* is one of Vaas' drug-induced fever dreams. But aside from a few structural similarities, this outrageous slice of downloadable entertainment is defiantly its own entity. The entirety of *Far Cry 3*'s archipelago has been overhauled, its lush green vegetation bathed in day-glo neon, its wildlife now overrun with laser-breathing dinosaurs and its organic soundtrack replaced with synth riffs that could curl John Carpenter's moustache. It's a raucous, warped and brawny ode to Eighties preposterousness and we're happy to report that it rarely hits a bum note.

It stars Eighties former action hero Michael Biehn, allowing him to indulge the halcyon days of his cinematic career for the second time this year (following *Aliens: Colonial Marines*' head-scratching retcon) voicing cyber commando Rex 'Power' Colt with a raspy, self-parodying glee. The well-pointed script plays out like a feature-length game of innuendo bingo as it reels off an avalanche of movie-references and declarations of vengeance, while utilising the knuckleheaded vernacular usually reserved for the depths of the DTV bargain basket hell.

But Rex is far from all talk. He's pre-loaded with Jason Brody's killer takedown moves, can sprint for longer distances and packs more explosives than a military fighter jet. He's a streamlined killing machine designed to run into battle guns blazing. Stealth is not an option. In fact, so little effort has been made to bolstering one of *Far Cry 3*'s fundamental gameplay pillars that it appears Ubisoft would rather you'd forget such a mechanic exists.

Despite this, *Blood Dragon* does retain some of its full-blooded forbear's DNA. Colt traverses the island to steal back outposts (here referred to as garrisons) and must hunt the indigenous wildlife that roam through its jungles. It's here that the high-concept premise delivers its most absurd twist: introducing the titular blood dragons that terrorise locals. These glowing prehistoric marvels take a considerable amount of firepower to beat, but can be better utilised as destructive weapons aimed – with a well-directed lob of a cybernetic heart removed from a deceased foe – at enemies to wreak havoc.

This is the pinnacle of balls-to-the-wall insanity that *Blood Dragon* indulges and is without a doubt its strongest asset – unlike, say, the kitschy pastiche on retro cutscenes that have the regrettable habit of outstaying their welcome.

Admittedly, the overall package does lack the coherency and polish of its mainline predecessor, but it's a meaty, gratifying dose of excess that refuses to pander to subtlety. And above all else, it should be applauded if only for achieving the rarest of feats: effectively grasping the over-the-top thrills and batshit irreverence of its conceit. Well done, commando Colt – you've done your people proud.

ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

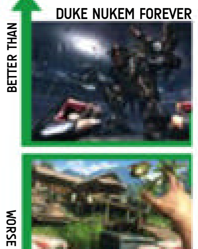
IT HAS DINOSAURS: It's a statistical fact that including dinosaurs in your franchise makes it 123.4 per cent better. Including laser-breathing dinosaurs makes it doubly so. Maths.

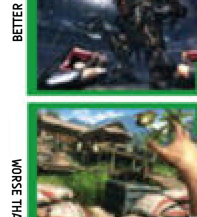
DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox 360
OTHER FORMATS: PC, PlayStation 3
ORIGIN: Canada
PUBLISHER: Ubisoft
DEVELOPER: In-house
PRICE: 1200 Points
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A

BETTER THAN

DUKE NUKEM FOREVER





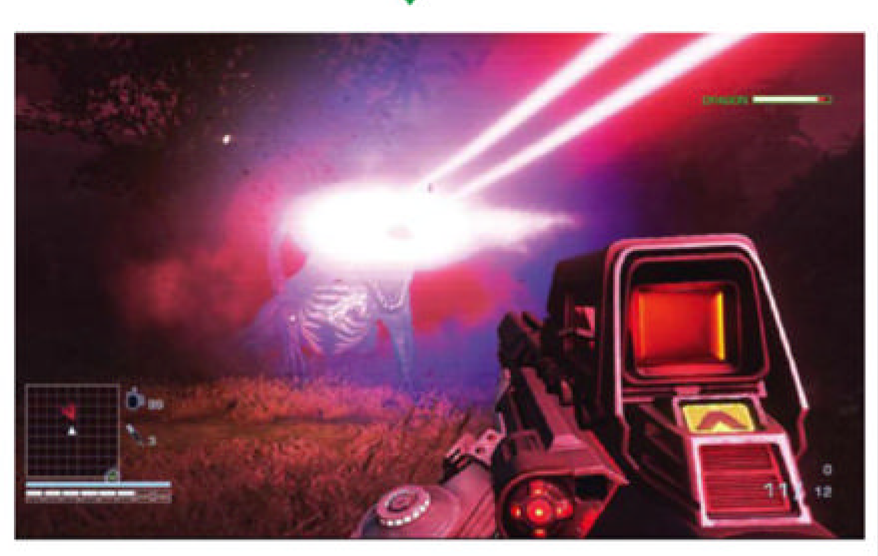
FAR CRY 3

WORSE THAN

VERDICT 8/10



EXPLOSIVELY CATHARTIC ACTION



Above: The weapons in *Blood Dragon* don't feel as slick as *Far Cry 3*'s but there's no denying that they're a much more satisfying arsenal to play around with. *Blood Dragon* does a great job of making the player feel empowered.





Above: This breed of t-Virus is more typical of the zombies of the original *Resident Evil* than they've been in years. It's just a shame it turns into a third-person shooter so soon into the game.

IF AT FIRST YOU DON'T SUCCEED…

Resident Evil Revelations

***Resident Evil* fans have had it pretty hard of late.** *Resident Evil 6* left the fanbase divided, while some may even claim the series has been in decline since *4*. Add the likes of *Operation Raccoon City* to an already sketchy collection of zombie games and you'll begin to wonder what you even liked about the franchise in the first place. Which is where *Resident Evil Revelations* comes in – at least that's what we're expected to believe.

Taking control of Jill Valentine once more, players are thrust aboard the Queen Zenobia, an eerie abandoned cruise liner believed to hold secrets of bioweapon terror organisation Veltro. So far, so very *Resident Evil*. And to its credit, this is one of the elements that really stands out about *Revelations*; it's like a little slice of *Resident Evil*. It's almost entirely separate from the stories we've become embroiled in, but compelling all the same. Unfortunately the episodic nature does ruin a lot of what could be great about *Revelations*, however simple its story may be.

Initially this simplicity plays into the gameplay, too. On board the Zenobia with nothing but a pistol, there's a thick atmosphere of isolation and dread that hasn't been in the franchise for a while. Unfortunately it is short-lived; it seems Capcom isn't willing to hold onto this particular strain of fear any more.

Part of this is due to the disparate episodes that fling you into the boots of a variety of different characters, from Chris Redfield, a younger Parker Luciani (Jill's partner) and a squaddie with the unassuming name of Keith – whose sections are entirely unnecessary. While Jill is initially pit against slow and lumbering t-Abyss-riddled corpses, these filler episodes with Chris and company aim to serve as the action sequences. While entertaining in their own right and a fair way of breaking up the pace, it seems more of a missed opportunity. By being trapped on board a decrepit cruise liner there was an opportunity to really play with the survival-horror genre in a way the original *Dead Space* did with the Ishimura.

Resident Evil Revelations lacks some of the polish the series has been known for too, a side effect of its heritage as a previously exclusive 3DS title. Though the efforts at bringing the game to consoles should be commended – honestly, Capcom has done a brilliant job – it still suffers from ropey animations and flat textures. Controls-wise you've not got your precious tank-controls (they're never coming back, people), but they're not well implemented either. Dodging, in particular, is extremely finicky, which can be a pain later on in the game.

As a port of a handheld game, *Resident Evil Revelations* was always going to be a hard sell – even to fans of the series. Had Capcom originally just concentrated its efforts on a console version then it could have been a stellar entry into the franchise. As it is, this is the best way to experience *Revelations*, but it's too indecisive about its approach and not nearly polished enough to work its way into the must-play category for entrenched *Resi* fans.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS3
OTHER FORMATS: 3DS, PC, Wii U, Xbox 360
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Capcom
DEVELOPER: In-house
PRICE: £32.99
RELEASE: 24 May 2013
PLAYERS: 1-2
ONLINE REVIEWED: No

BETTER THAN: RESIDENT EVIL: OPERATION RACCOON CITY

WORSE THAN: RESIDENT EVIL 5

MISSING LINK

WHAT WE WOULD CHANGE

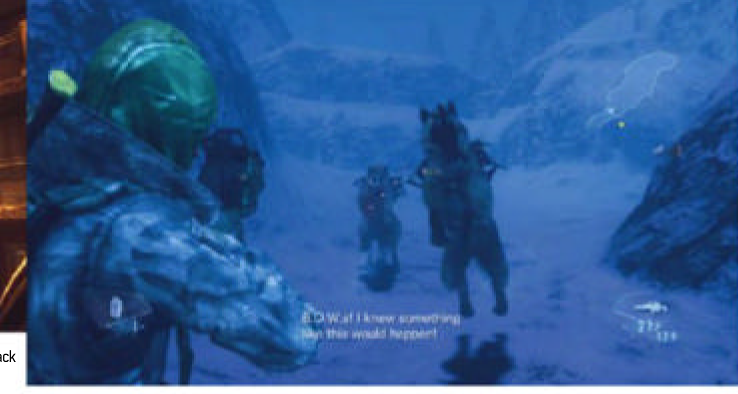
LESSON LEARNED: It seems a shame to say a *Resident Evil* game could have learnt something from the original *Dead Space*, but it has a sense of isolation that was untapped with *Revelations*.

VERDICT 7/10

UNSURE OF ITSELF, BUT ENTERTAINING NONETHELESS



Above: Exploring the Zenobia is reminiscent of traipsing around Spencer Mansion. There's a lot of back and forth, but this time you're not quite so limited on ammo so the threat never feels as potent.



CRIMINAL MINDS

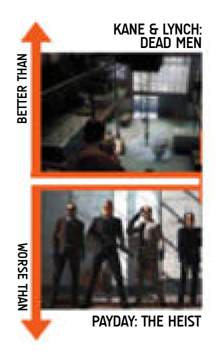
Monaco: What's Yours Is Mine

DETAILS

FORMAT: 360
OTHER FORMATS: PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Majesco Entertainment
DEVELOPER: Pocketwatch Games
PRICE: 1200 Points
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1-4
ONLINE REVIEWED: Yes

BETTER THAN: KANE & LYNCH: DEAD MEN

WORSE THAN: PAYDAY: THE HEIST



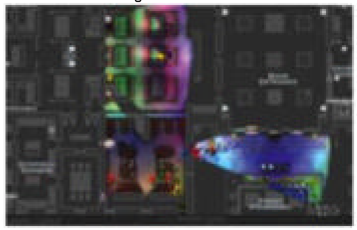
Expertly crafted and sometimes witheringly difficult, *Monaco: What's Yours Is Mine* is a heist game where you have to put the pieces together to pull off the perfect job.

Players pick from an increasing range of characters with different perks, like burrowing through walls, knocking enemies out and popping on disguises that give you a limited ability to sneak past guards. It's beautifully put together, giving you abilities that empower rather than overpower, with each character slotting nicely together as you compose the formula that each level demands. The objectives quickly go from something easily managed in single-player to bewilderingly complex end goals that require a canny knowledge of each level's design, inside and out, as you opt whether to exploit secret passageways around the fringes of the environment or use careful timing to sprint through populated areas. It's a real adrenaline rush, and that's because every system works exactly as it should.

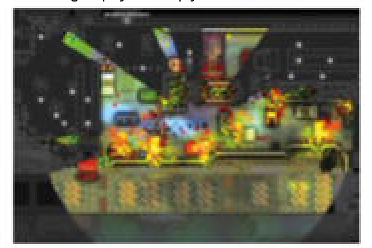
The stealth mechanics are so pure; there are no cheap deaths, and failure in *Monaco* only serves as a learning experience. It rewards precision, and as such only functions perfectly when you're playing alongside users who actually give a crap – it's too delicately designed to be played any other way, really. There's also a loose story that we would count as a fluffy extra designed to give an extra dimension to your cast of crooks. Not that it's necessary. Mastering the specialities of each character and how they fit into each level is the lifeblood of *Monaco*, and it gives this well-crafted £11.99 title a puzzle-game-like compulsion that speaks of both great game design and value for money.

VERDICT 8/10
IT MUST BE YOURS

Below: Stealth plays a key role in *Monaco*, but the mechanics are nothing short of excellent.



Below: It can get difficult at times, but the carefully balanced gameplay will keep you entertained.



IF YOU GO DOWN TO THE WOODS TODAY...

Don't Starve

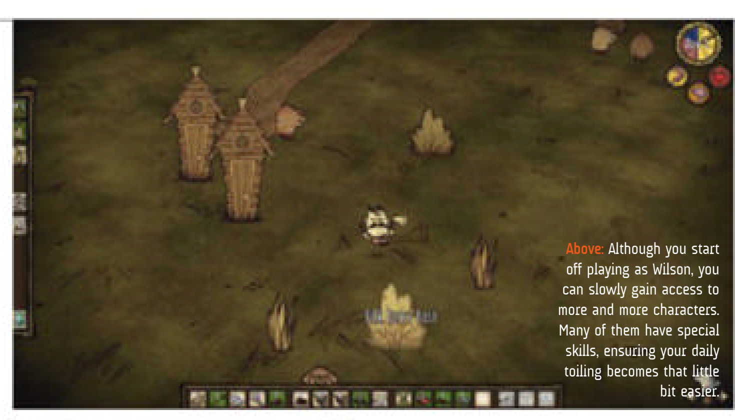
DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: Canada
PUBLISHER: Klei Entertainment
DEVELOPER: In-house
PRICE: £11.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A

BETTER THAN: POKEMON MYSTERY DUNGEON: GATES TO INFINITY

AS GOOD AS: SHIREN THE WANDERER



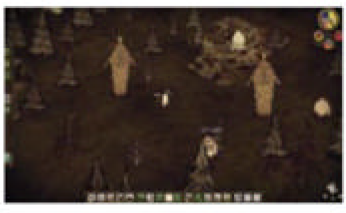


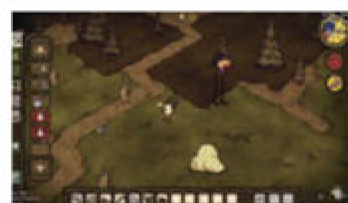
Above: Although you start off playing as Wilson, you can slowly gain access to more and more characters. Many of them have special skills, ensuring your daily toiling becomes that little bit easier.

Klei Entertainment likes to mess with conventions. *Mark Of The Ninja* took the stealth genre in exciting new directions, while *Shank* breathed fresh life into the ailing scrolling fighter. Klei's latest offering, *Don't Starve*, once again appears to be one thing – a traditional roguelike – but ends up being so much more.

From the moment main character Wilson gets dropped into *Don't Starve*'s randomly generated world you know it's special. With a landscape seemingly cut from stiff pieces of paper and an art style that looks like it's been plucked from the feverish mind of Tim Burton, *Don't Starve* delivers a delightful environment that deftly mixes the macabre with the surreal.

And you'll want to explore the diorama-like world because Klei has filled it with all manner of weird and wonderful things. The aim of *Don't Starve* is to survive as long as possible, holding off your inevitable death by mixing together all manner of resources to create food, weapons and shelter. There are no handy tutorials, no quick and easy prompts and no real story to speak of – just a dangerous world where you must constantly experiment in order to keep your avatar alive.



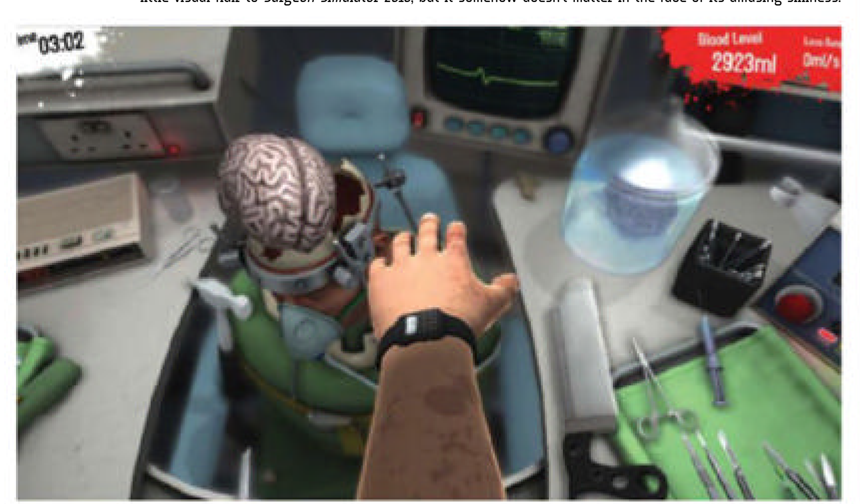


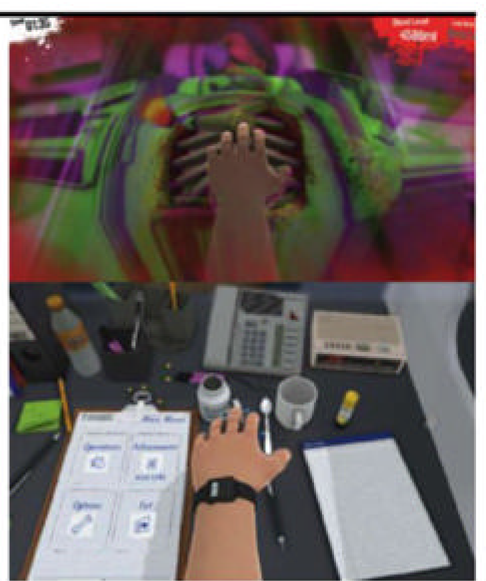
The magic of *Don't Starve* comes from this bold experimentation; it comes through the discovery of wormholes, or the altars that will bring you back to life (without your previous items of course) or even a village full of docile pig-men. It offers a surreal experience that's only let down by the annoying reset of your character at the beginning of each new game. Ultimately, though, it's a game that just keeps giving, even as it tears your life from you.



VERDICT 8/10
AS BEAUTIFUL AS IT IS IMAGINATIVE

Below: Essentially as medically accurate as *Grey's Anatomy* or even the Dr Nick scenes in *The Simpsons*, there's little visual flair to *Surgeon Simulator 2013*, but it somehow doesn't matter in the face of its amusing silliness.





POSSIBLY THE LEAST ACCURATE SIM YOU'LL EVER PLAY, IN MORE WAYS THAN ONE

Surgeon Simulator 2013

It all sounds simple enough. You are a surgeon, or, rather, you are in charge of the left hand of a surgeon who is tasked with performing critical transplant operations on a series of luckless men. Each individual finger on the hand is controlled via the keyboard, and exact positioning and angle is covered with the mouse. You grab various surgical tools (and sometimes pencils), introduce them to the innards of the patient, and do your best to not kill them via accidental blood loss.

It is hilariously awkward to control; the closest experience you've had to it before now is playing Operation, using a fairground claw machine, or perhaps trying to quietly unlock your front door while you are falling-down drunk.

Originally programmed as part of a game jam it is – of course – a joke. It is as such a simulation of surgery as *Mario* games are a simulation of plumbing or *Sonic* games are a simulation of being a hedgehog. And for the most part, it's a joke that works – the absurdity of the thing covers up an awful lot of the problems with it. Instructions are vague at best; we played for a long time without realising that the green syringe stops the patient from haemorrhaging, rather than merely giving you wild hallucinations when you accidentally prick your finger on it.

But that's all part of the fun, really. The joy of exploration, the satisfying release when a patient's heart comes loose after minutes of tense lean-into-your-monitor-and-squint knife work, the sense that this is a strange and largely forgiving world with rules that must be discovered through play, not presented to the player as a matter of course. The lack of feedback can get frustrating at times, especially when it's a challenge to even pick up the instruments you're provided with. Wobbling them around in the patient and hoping that something useful falls off is often the only applicable tactic and there's a lot of trial and error needed to succeed. Which knife is the right knife for, say, stomach removal? Is there even a right knife for stomach removal? Does it matter too much if we leave a wristwatch inside the patient, again? How do we stop these wild hallucinations? Can a man really survive with both of his lungs casually discarded on the operating room floor?

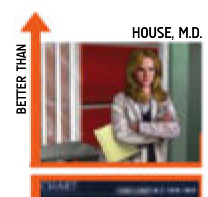
But those aren't the sort of questions that you should be asking. *Surgeon Simulator 2013* is rather a lot of fun, all things considered, and is certainly the sort of thing you could show off to your friends, take turns, and do your best not to accidentally drop the always-on electric drill in such a way that it spins wildly off of the table and buries itself in the patient's eye socket. It's what his family would have wanted.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: Bossa Studios
DEVELOPER: In-house
PRICE: $9.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A

BETTER THAN

HOUSE, M.D.



WORSE THAN



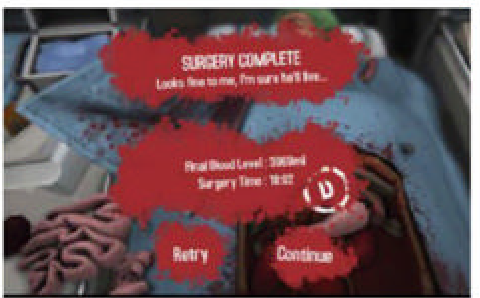


TRAUMA CENTER

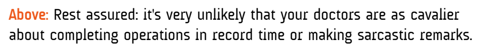
MISSING LINK

WHAT WE WOULD CHANGE

MORE FEEDBACK, PLEASE!: While keeping information from the player lends itself well to hilarious consequences, it can make progression through the game feel arbitrary.





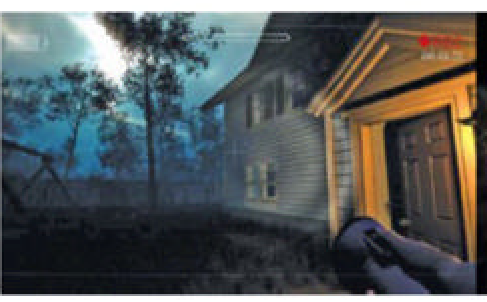

Above: Rest assured: it's very unlikely that your doctors are as cavalier about completing operations in record time or making sarcastic remarks.

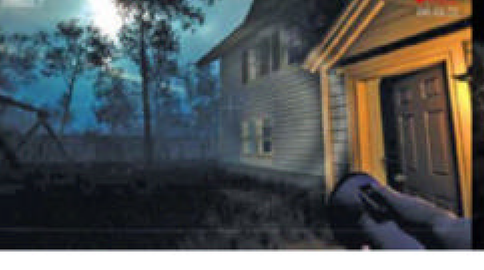

VERDICT 6/10
INGENIOUS, IN A REMARKABLY STUPID WAY

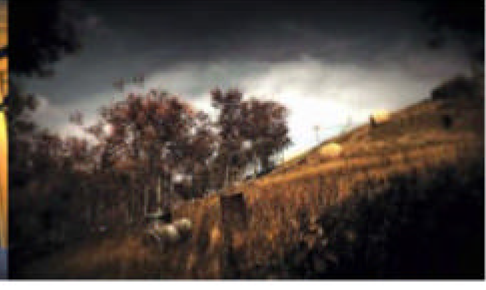
WALKING TALL

Slender: The Arrival

Below: Slenderman is the first monster of the digital age, having been dreamed up on the SomethingAwful forums and the subject of many a skilled photoshop job. Here, though, his threat is diminished by his general malaise.







Probably the most successful and wide-reaching entry in the modern PC indie horror movement, the original *Slender: The Eight Pages* created somewhat of a stir last year with its heavy atmosphere, growling soundtrack and, of course, that rather tall fellow himself, the Slenderman.

Keen to capitalise on that free game's success, Blue Isle Studios has handsomely remade and extended its original game, turning it into something more meaty (and a hell of a lot better looking). Playing as a woman called Lauren (although in reality you're nothing more than a hand with a torch), you begin the game during the day, walking towards an old farmhouse, looking for your friend Kate. Quickly, it becomes obvious all is not right, as the house is empty, chairs are upturned and windows smashed, and there are drawings of Slenderman himself all over the place.

From there, the game then settles into a familiar rhythm. Its first chapter is a direct remake of the original game, where you traipse around the woods in the dark looking for those same eight pages. With every one you collect, Slenderman's presence becomes more obvious, and before long you can barely take a couple of steps without his lanky frame leering over you.

It's an effective set up and the atmosphere is thick, but as with the original, the mechanics soon wear thin. Slenderman himself isn't especially scary once you get past the jumps, and soon his presence just becomes irritating – a jolt shock at every turn when you're fumbling about in the dark looking for things.

Later levels introduce a second antagonist, but the gameplay loop is the same. If you can completely buy into the mythos, there's no doubt the game is creepy, but the actual interaction with the world is so dull and arduous that it's just so easy to see behind the curtain.

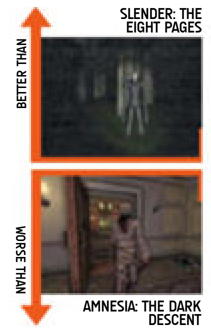
With no way of combating Slenderman (a wise decision), but also no real way of hiding from him bar running and hoping he doesn't spawn directly in front of you, the game is little more than an unfair version of *Pac-Man* in the dark. And if you make a mistake and Slendy gets you, you have to start the entire chapter again, complete with its randomly placed items. No one's saying a game like this should be fun, but it should at least be engaging on a somewhat deeper level than it is.

The world of YouTube and the likes of wildly successful personalities like PewDiePie have created a vicious circle where horror games are being made just to appear on his and other channels. *Slender: The Arrival* feels like this movement in microcosm: heavy on parlour tricks but lacking any real substance.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
OTHER FORMATS: Mac
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Parsec Productions
DEVELOPER: Blue Isle Studios
PRICE: £6.66
RELEASE: Out Now
PLAYERS: 1

BETTER THAN: SLENDER: THE EIGHT PAGES



WORSE THAN: AMNESIA: THE DARK DESCENT

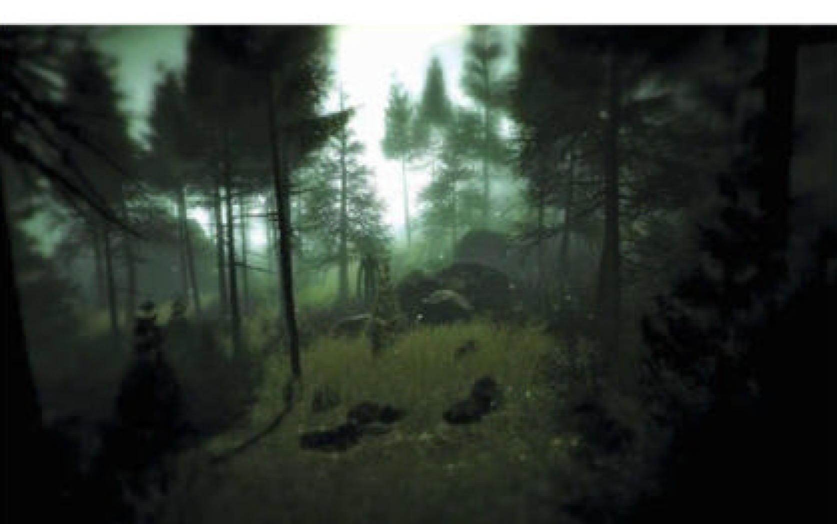
MISSING LINK

WHAT WE WOULD CHANGE

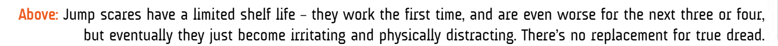
BOO!: The relentless appearance of the Slenderman diminishes the tension. In any horror, the monster is always scariest before it makes a physical appearance; less is more.

VERDICT 5/10

STYLISH AND SHOCKING, BUT ULTIMATELY ONE DIMENSIONAL







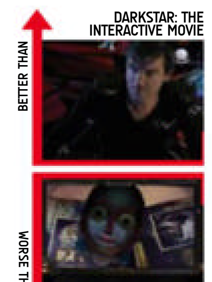
Above: Jump scares have a limited shelf life – they work the first time, and are even worse for the next three or four, but eventually they just become irritating and physically distracting. There's no replacement for true dread.

A SPACE ODDITY

The Starship Damrey

DETAILS

FORMAT: 3DS
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Level-5
DEVELOPER: In-house
PRICE: £7.19
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1



Part of Japan's second motley of exported *Guild* titles, *The Starship Damrey* pitches itself as an atmospheric survival-horror trial set within the monochrome corridors of a derelict interstellar vessel. But much like the infinite vacuity of space, this title finds itself suffocating due to its absence of life-sustaining atmosphere.

After awaking from cryogenic sleep, trapped within a stasis pod, the player is tasked with exploring the ship through the eyes of one of the Damrey's many service droids. What this amounts to is a few hours of cumbersomely navigating said robot around pokey hallways, restricted to fiddly 90-degree turns and a limited perspective. This combination of slight mechanics would have been made more irritating had the game possessed any discernible amount of depth, but with the overwhelming majority of tasks requiring players to carry out mundane variations of transporting objects from one area of the ship to another this can feel more like a forklift simulator than a mystery-driven adventure tale.

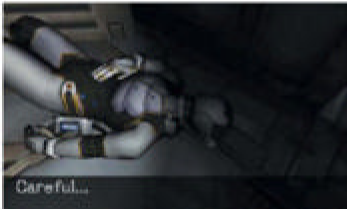
Admittedly, the minimalist approach to design is admirable at least. Audio cues are considered and occasionally effective and the use of a short-range torch as a guide through the blackened bowels of the ship suggests that there could be a great horror game buried beneath the surface. It fuels a mushrooming tension that sadly deflates shortly after its opening; Level-5 instead opts for a few cliché jump scares rather than permeating the environment with a relentless eeriness or oppressive dread.

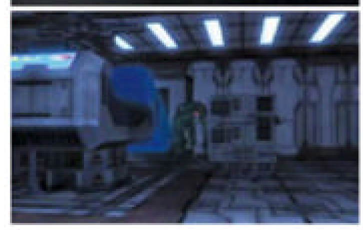
What's left is not much at all. A tiresome exploration of a limp mystery, featuring all the terrifying ambience of a discarded glass of stale tap water. A few hours ambling around this vapid environment is far too long.

VERDICT 2/10
A CHORE FROM START TO FINISH

Below: After the credits have rolled, the game continues a lengthy epilogue that details every facet of story in excruciating detail. It's a clunky resolution for many dangling plot threads that you'll neither care about, nor remember.







SPARKLING DIALOGUE, AVERAGE GAME OF CARDS

Poker Night 2

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: United States
OTHER FORMATS: Xbox 360, PlayStation 3, iOS
PUBLISHER: Telltale Games
DEVELOPER: In-house
PRICE: £3.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A



You have to hand it to Telltale Games, it might not be a dab hand at poker, but it certainly knows the value of hip cross promotion. Its latest trip to the Inventory features another group of iconic characters that will have culture geeks salivating the world over. *The Venture Bros*' Brock Samson puts in an appearance, *The Evil Dead*'s Ash Williams drops by to deliver sardonic one-liners – although Bruce Campbell is nowhere to be seen – while *Borderlands*' Claptrap rolls away with most of the funniest jokes. The five-man table is rounded off with Telltale's Sam and *Portal*'s GLaDOS who stops by to deal out cards and acerbic barbs.

As with the original game, *Poker Night 2* is just as much about the player patter as it is about the actual playing of cards. And just like the original it shows its hand far too early, delivering plenty of biting wit, but no real depth. The dialogue of *Poker Night 2* is truly sparkling, with every single character being given a chance to shine. Telltale knows comedy and there are plenty of moments that will genuinely make you laugh out loud, particularly the zingers from GLaDOS, who is just as sharp here as she was in *Portal*.

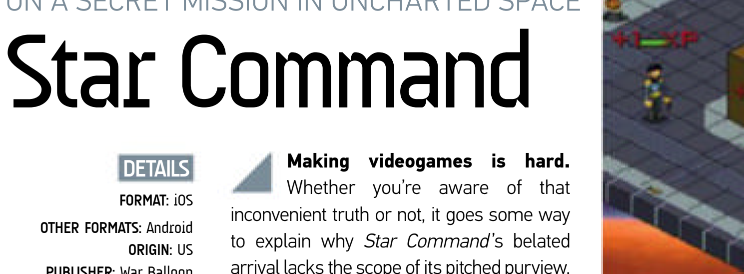
While the writing and jokes are of a very high standard, they soon weaken due to repeated use and it's not long (a few hours) before everything feels familiar and overstretched. Once you get past the witty banter you realise that the poker itself is very rudimentary, and while both Texas Hold 'Em and Omaha are included, the average AI means it wont be long before you've unlocked the admittedly cool bonuses that let you download goodies for the likes of *Borderlands 2* and *Team Fortress 2*.

Small challenges have been included to add a little more longevity to proceedings, but the frustrating omission of multiplayer and general lack of gameplay modes means it's not long before you've seen everything the Inventory has to offer. It's certainly fun while it lasts though.

Below: The flop remains one of the most exciting aspects of the game, with Telltale nailing the atmosphere perfectly. There's nothing better than watching Claptrap go absolutely mental when his seemingly perfect hand falls to pieces.



VERDICT 6/10
FUN ENOUGH, BUT IT SADLY LACKS DEPTH



ON A SECRET MISSION IN UNCHARTED SPACE

Star Command

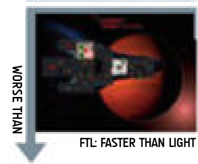
DETAILS

FORMAT: iOS
OTHER FORMATS: Android
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: War Balloon Games
DEVELOPER: In-house
PRICE: £1.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A

BETTER THAN

STAR TREK





FTL: FASTER THAN LIGHT

WORSE THAN

Making videogames is hard. Whether you're aware of that inconvenient truth or not, it goes some way to explain why *Star Command*'s belated arrival lacks the scope of its pitched purview. It's tempting to deplore the pixel-cute space opera for everything that it isn't – namely, a handful of feature omissions proposed in the original Kickstarter outline – but that would be cruelly missing the point of an otherwise engaging and spirited game.

The pillars of *Star Command*'s gameplay are fundamentally divided into two halves. First you must outfit your modest star vessel with essential facilities and crew, assigning each of the ship's willing underlings with a specific role aboard the craft. Each crew member is easily distinguishable: engineers wear yellow shirts, red shirts man the guns and blue shirts act as medics. Managerial requirements are minimal: making sure science, artillery and mechanical are fully operational, and redistributing resources when a destructive threat dictates it.

Star Command doesn't offer much time to comprehend the various systems, as it propels players through space on a linear set of missions, almost all of which conclude with a battle with an extra-terrestrial species. The ill-considered escalation in difficulty results in a turbulent first hour involving dying ensigns, hull breaches and juggling crew members between multiple sectors in a panic-induced bout of galactic musical chairs. The key is effectively shirt-swapping your way through a major conflict, responding to marauders beaming aboard your ship by repositioning crew effectively in different departments without leaving a plasma cannon unmanned or a dodgy generator without an engineer on hand.

This is rarely anything other than a taut experience, and the introduction of an effective crop of simplistic time-based minigames (used to launch attacks on enemy ships) commingled into the main action amplifies the tension tremendously.

Persevere beyond the obfuscation and awkwardness of the opening act and everything begins to click into place: your finely-tuned vessel becomes a labour of pride, and deliberating how best to distribute tokens rewarded post-conflicts – the in-game currency used to build, staff and upgrade facilities – becomes genuinely involving. But the simulation side of *Star Command* barely stretches beyond those principles, ultimately lacking the depth to truly compel once its meagre campaign concludes – more advanced ships become available after the game is complete – but despite this, its limitations feel of little consequence. *Star Command* essentially amounts to a pastiche of sci-fi television tropes (with all the superficiality that invokes) rather than a full immersion into the role of an actual captain. It might not match up to the developer's original intentions, but it's more than a worthy voyage into a new world.

VERDICT 7/10

AN UNEVEN SLICE OF SCI-FI HOMAGE

SYNTHESIS

BRINGING GENRES TOGETHER

TREK WARS: *Star Command* boldly attempts to merge space exploration with intergalactic warfare, but dedicates too much time to the latter and lacks the depth to succeed with the former.



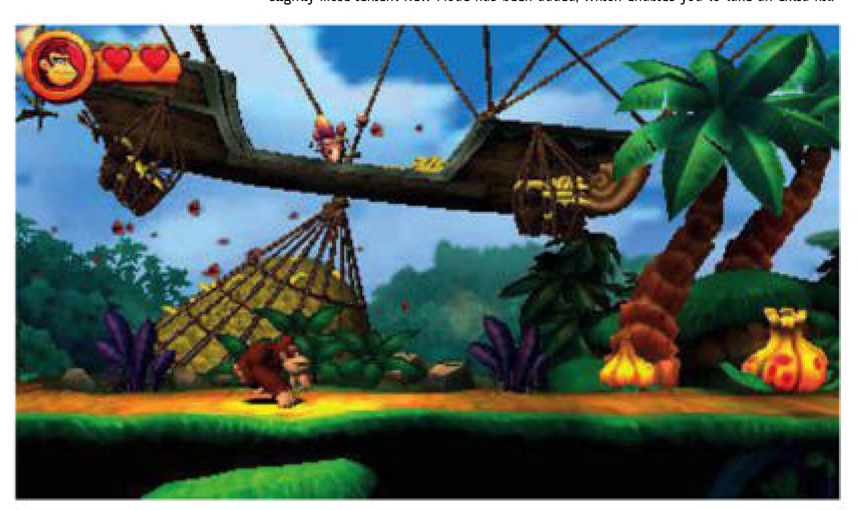
Above: Clicking on a resource in a staffed room can often be a frustration, often missing the intended target and hitting a crew member instead. A little more generosity given with the click box would be welcome.





Above: War Balloon states that *Star Command* is only 30 per cent of the original vision. Features that didn't make the cut include a diplomacy system, negotiation, torture and the ability to visit and explore alien worlds. Well, it'll make a sequel.

Below: The Wii version's challenging difficulty level remains in *Donkey Kong Country Returns 3D*, although the slightly more lenient New Mode has been added, which enables you to take an extra hit.





DOES THE HIGH-END WII REVAMP DESERVE A HANDHELD PORT?

Donkey Kong Country Returns 3D

***Donkey Kong Country Returns*' ruthless difficulty must have come as a shock to younger audiences in 2010.** Rather than a reskinned *New Super Mario Bros* as the marketing might have suggested, it was very much in the vein of Retro's *Metroid Prime* in that it passionately updated the source material, maintaining the same level of challenge but visually bringing it in line with modern Nintendo titles. This 3DS version is stronger than its Wii counterpart thanks to a broader array of difficulty options, as well as being a surprisingly ideal match for the handheld.

Since motion control only played a small role to *Donkey Kong Country Returns*, there's nothing sacrificed in the game's transition to 3DS, with only extremely rare moments of slowdown hinting that this once ran on a home console. This is otherwise the definitive version of *Donkey Kong* due to its less aggressive New Mode, which gives you more chances to mess up in the trickier levels with an extra heart, while the original Wii experience is bundled in too.



DETAILS

FORMAT: 3DS
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: Retro Studios/ Monster Games
PRICE: £39.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1-2



Thing is, even with that option available, few players are likely to breeze through *Donkey Kong Country Returns*. From the very first world, there's no easy introduction or breezy filler levels – even the first boss is a bit of a bastard, and the set-pieces in each level require a lot more than just sprinting or jumping out of the way. Staying calm under pressure is key to reaching the finish line, which is something of a lost art with Nintendo platformers, and some sequences are so tricky that they rely entirely on razor sharp muscle memory.

As we said back when the game released in 2010, it's reassuring to see that Nintendo still makes games like this. For those worrying that *Donkey Kong Country Returns* sits alongside more simplified Nintendo experiences to reach the largest audience possible, Retro's platformer almost entirely counters that thinking.

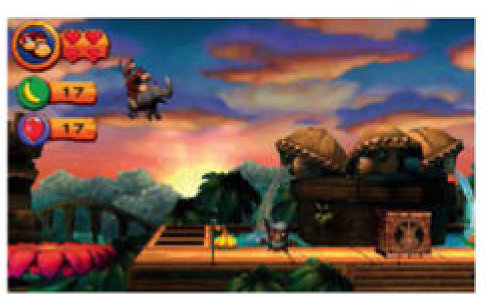
FINGERPRINT

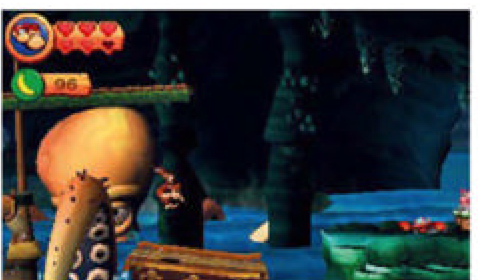
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

PERSPECTIVE SHIFTING: *Donkey Kong Country Returns* always found novel ways to throw you around different planes of the 2D environment, and that design tenet lives on.

What's surprising and impressive about *Returns 3D* is the way its level design comfortably fits the capabilities of the 3DS. Veterans may remember the perspective of this 2D platformer shifting between the background and foreground at certain moments, which naturally makes sense when you've got the 3D slider turned up; we'd even hazard a guess that this was the reason behind *Donkey Kong Country Returns*' port to the 3DS, but either way, there's a pleasant crossover in content, here. If you're coming in fresh to the series, there are few clues that this didn't originate on the handheld.

Donkey Kong Country Returns isn't as progressive as Retro's work on *Metroid Prime*, it must be said, and in some ways a 2D platformer never seemed like the best use of a developer with such skill in creating atmospheric 3D environments. Yet at the same time, it's possibly the strongest example of a retro reprieve that Nintendo has put out in recent years, something that genuinely feels like a fresh remix of an antiquated template. Perhaps this 3D edition is not essential for those well-versed with the Wii release, but a safe bet for those who missed it the first time around.







ANOTHER WORTHY 3DS RELEASE IN 2013

NO TEN-HIT COMBOS TO BE FOUND HERE

Tekken Card Tournament

DETAILS

FORMAT: Android
OTHER FORMATS: iOS
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Namco Bandai
DEVELOPER: In-house
PRICE: Free
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1-2
ONLINE REVIEWED: Yes

AS GOOD AS

PAC-MAN (FREE TO PLAY)





WORSE THAN

UNCHARTED: FIGHT FOR FORTUNE

For a game that has come out of nowhere, is based on a fighting game series and is free, *Tekken Card Tournament* is surprisingly good. It's a turn-based card game powered by a simple guessing game. If you Focus, you draw a card. If you Strike, you attack with all of your collected cards. If you block, you cancel out damage from your opponent's first two cards. If we're being generous, we could say the rock-paper-scissors guessing games mirror the mid-low-throw guessing games of the *Tekken* series itself. The presentation matches that of the series – it has good character models and animation, backgrounds from *Tekken 6*, and music from *Tekken Tag 2*.

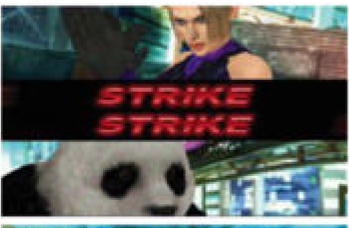
Unfortunately for a game that has come out of nowhere, is based on a fighting game series and is free, *Tekken Card Tournament* also has some glaring flaws. The biggest problem is the inescapable freemium structure, which constantly prods you to invite friends, connect to Facebook, claim free gold to buy more cards with and so on. It's a major and constant irritation.

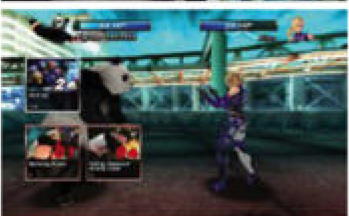
The other problem comes from long-term play. A stamina bar restricts how much EXP you earn in a single play session while the randomly unlocked cards are spread across the entire cast of characters and not just the one you've chosen. This makes *Tekken Card Tournament* feel like a needless grind, a problem made worse by the fact this delays how long it takes to build an interesting deck stuffed with cards that have extra properties.

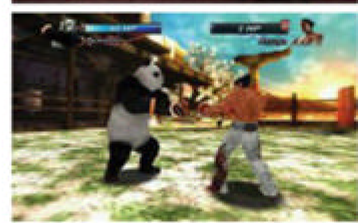
An online mode just about saves the experience because even though it is wildly imbalanced, at least you can see the decks and cards other players boast. It's a good incentive to keep going. *Tekken Card Tournament* shows Namco Bandai is heading in the right direction with its freemium projects, but even so, there is still a long way to go.

VERDICT 5/10
WORTH INVESTIGATING BUT FLAWS DETER LONG-TERM PLAY

Below: You have to choose Focus, Strike or Block while your opponent does the same. It's a system that's mostly to do with guessing what your opponent will do and picking the appropriate counter-measure.







A DAY OF THE DEAD-THEMED ROMP

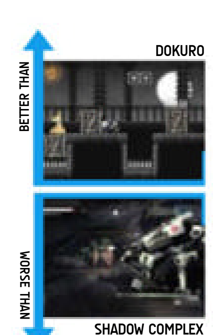
Guacamelee!

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation 3
OTHER FORMATS: PS Vita
ORIGIN: Canada
PUBLISHER: Sony Entertainment
DEVELOPER: Drinkbox Studios
PRICE: £9.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 2
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A

BETTER THAN

DOKURO



WORSE THAN

SHADOW COMPLEX

***Guacamelee!* is slavishly dedicated to honouring the customs of the Mexican Day of the Dead festival.** From its outset, the Drinkbox-developed platformer is a dance with the senses; bursting with colour, humour and an irrelevant tone throughout that serves to immerse the player in a visually arresting take on Mexican folklore.

Taking control of Juan Aguacate, a down-on-his luck wrestler with grandiose dreams, the player sets out on a quest to rescue El Presidente's daughter from the clutches of Carlos Calaca, an evil skeleton hell bent on retribution. Thankfully, Juan acquires a mask that turns him into the world's greatest luchador, and so he sets out on an adventure between the lands of the living and dead.

Guacamelee! is never afraid to subvert expectations, planting tongue firmly in cheek as Juan sets out to rescue his love. Draped in calavera-themed, *Metroid*-like design, *Guacamelee!* is a loving ode to 2D platformers of the past, as players are challenged with a variety of environmental and combat puzzles.



Above: *Guacamelee!* is a visually arresting title from start to finish; it's brimming with personality and colour from the title screen and never lets up. The music is equally as pleasing, providing plenty for players to enjoy.

But Drinkbox hasn't let combat fall by the wayside, realising that style can't come at the expense of substance. It's here where *Guacamelee!* marks its major departure from the Metroidvania design conceits, as it also doubles up as a fairly robust melee brawler.

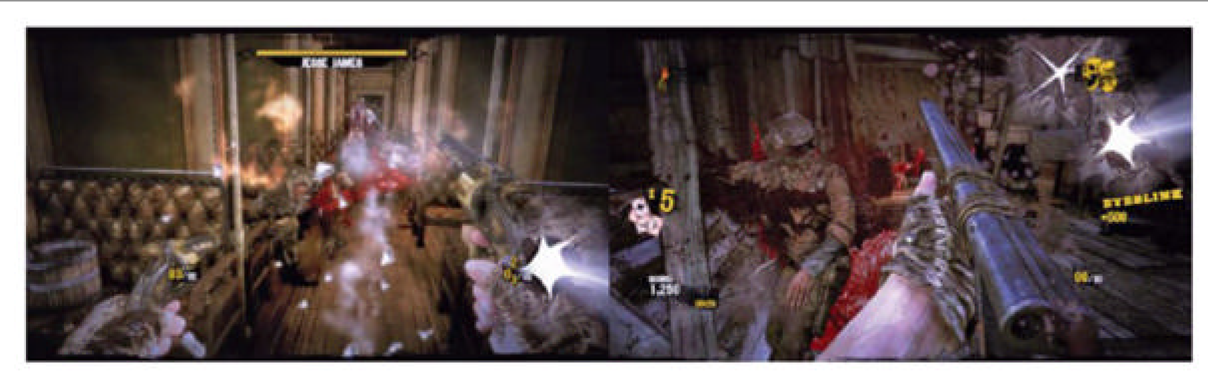
The mechanics are quick and easy to pick up but difficult to master, as Juan takes advantage of his Luchador skills. It's fun for the most part, but in the latter portions of the game the systems don't hold together as well as you'd expect. The combat eventually turns into a button-mashing frenzy, challenging dexterity (and patience) as the limited upgrade and combo systems suffocate under the game's lofty requirements.

Guacamelee! has its problems, but most can be overlooked as you drown in the deliriously entertaining world of memes, Mexican culture and engaging gameplay. It's not the best 2D adventure to be found on PlayStation systems, but it's a wonderful example of Sony's dedication to bringing new and independent experiences to the hands of its users.

VERDICT 8/10
A DAY OF THE DEAD TRIBUTE TO SAMUS AND FRIENDS



1 IN GAMING AUDIO
TURTLE BEACH
GREAT SOUND AND COMFORT
CUSTOMISABLE AUDIO
MADE FOR YOUR MEDIA
EASY AUDIO CONTROL
WORKS WITH
PLAYSTATION®3 • XBOX 360™
PC • MAC • MOBILE
PX22
Available now from
Argos
and other major retailers
VISIT US AT
TURTLEBEACH.COM
© 2013 Voyetra Turtle Beach, Inc. (VTB, Inc.) All rights reserved. Turtle Beach and the Turtle Beach Logo are either trademarks or registered trademarks of VTB, Inc.
Major League Gaming, MLG, the MLG logo and the MLG Pro Circuit logo are the exclusive properties of Major League Gaming Inc. All other trademarks are properties of their respective companies and are hereby acknowledged.



Left: Arcade mode takes the score-attack element of the campaign and makes it the main focus in short, arena-like stages. Getting the highest rank on every level is no small task, and upgradeable loadouts ensure replay value.

TECHLAND'S WILD WEST SERIES GETS BACK ON TRACK

Call Of Juarez: Gunslinger

Western games had an easy time of it before *Red Dead Redemption.* And then Rockstar came along and defined and refined exactly what a videogame could do with a Wild West setting, and suddenly Techland's *Call Of Juarez* series didn't seem quite as interesting as before.

After shifting away from the setting of the awful *The Cartel*, Techland takes a different approach with the setting in *Gunslinger*. This is the old west by way of *Borderlands* – everything is cel-shaded, colourful and heavily outlined like pages in a comic book. This presentation brings to mind cheap and tatty dime novels, full of trashy stories wildly exaggerated beyond any semblance of truth, and it's a look that works wonderfully with the best thing about *Gunslinger*: the storytelling.

The game is framed as the tales of grizzled bounty hunter Silas Greaves. As Silas drinks in a dusty saloon, he narrates his life story to a rapt audience, and the scenery literally grows and falls into place around him as he sets the scene. Remarkable in action, the constant narration from Silas and his new friends is reminiscent of *Bastion* and lends the game a similar storybook feel.

This approach is best when it plays with the idea of an unreliable narrator. Sometimes Silas misremembers things, exaggerates or jumps around in time to add background. The Native Americans you are fighting may suddenly disappear as Silas remembers they weren't actually there, or you might find yourself rewinding back through the section you just played before doing it again with a completely different story. It sounds intrusive but it works so well that it's always entertaining.

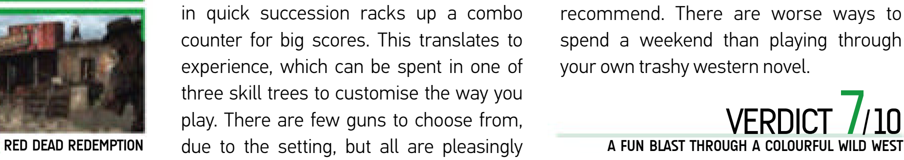
Gameplay is standard FPS fare with an arcade sheen. Players get points for killing enemies in fancy ways, and offing a bunch in quick succession racks up a combo counter for big scores. This translates to experience, which can be spent in one of three skill trees to customise the way you play. There are few guns to choose from, due to the setting, but all are pleasingly meaty and honestly, the basic revolver is so much fun you'll rarely want to use anything else anyway. Once you unlock the ability to dual-wield them, you are basically set.

While there is a little more to *Call Of Juarez* than shooting lots of guys with a few guns, it does wane slightly towards the end. This isn't a particularly long game, taking around six hours to blast through, but extra arcade and dual modes add some value. Arcade mode takes the score attack element and makes it the main focus, and getting the highest rank on every mission is rather an enticing proposition.

There isn't much to *Call Of Juarez: Gunslinger* once you get past the unique storytelling, but the simple shooting is so satisfying that it's still quite easy to recommend. There are worse ways to spend a weekend than playing through your own trashy western novel.

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox 360
OTHER FORMATS: PS3/PC
ORIGIN: Poland
PUBLISHER: Ubisoft
DEVELOPER: Techland
PRICE: 1200 Points/£11.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A



BETTER THAN: CALL OF JUAREZ: THE CARTEL

WORSE THAN: RED DEAD REDEMPTION

FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

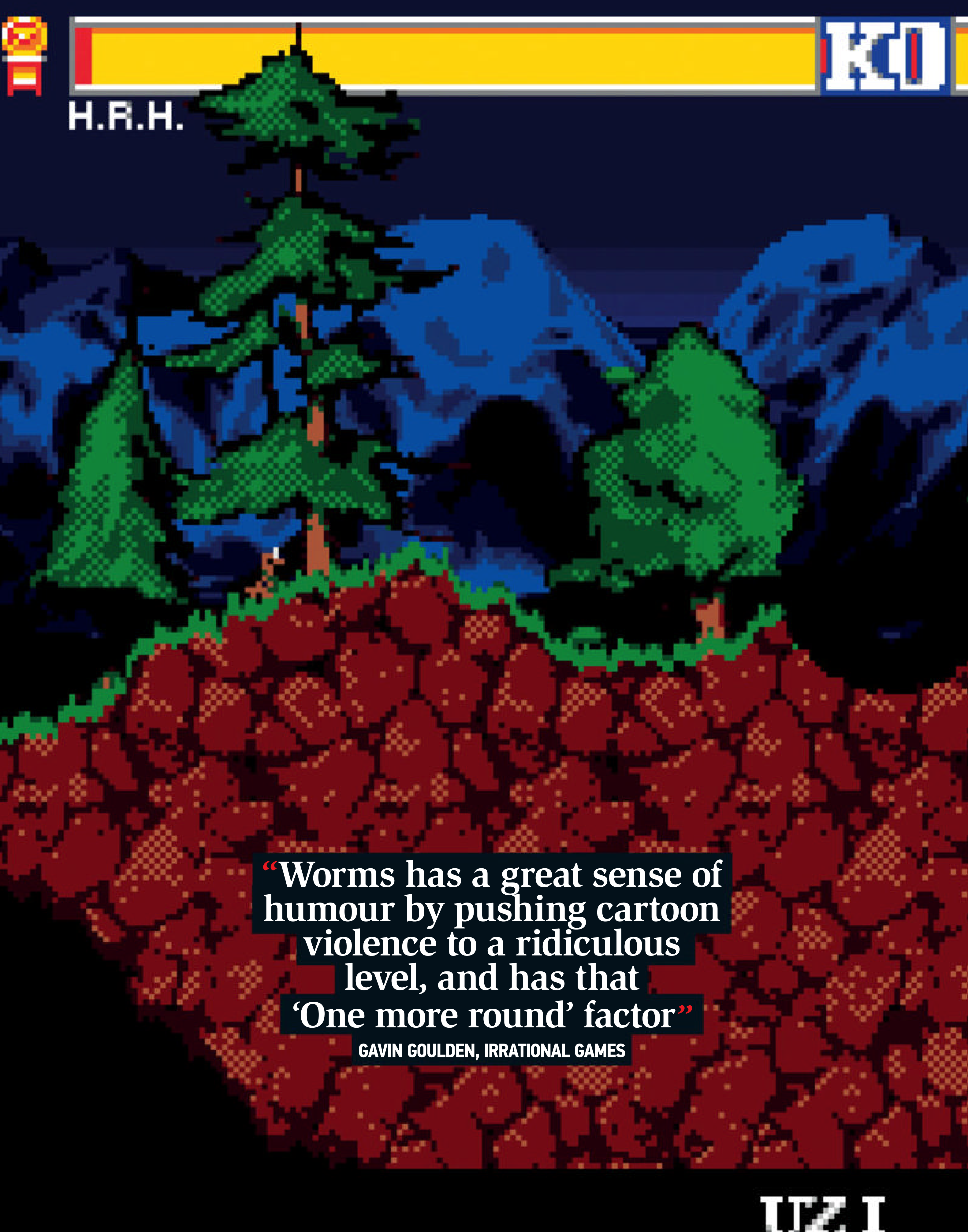
WHEN I WAS YOUNG: Silas narrating the story as the player experiences it is a great touch that is best when the old warrior forgets or makes things up on the fly, drastically altering the situation.

VERDICT 7/10

A FUN BLAST THROUGH A COLOURFUL WILD WEST

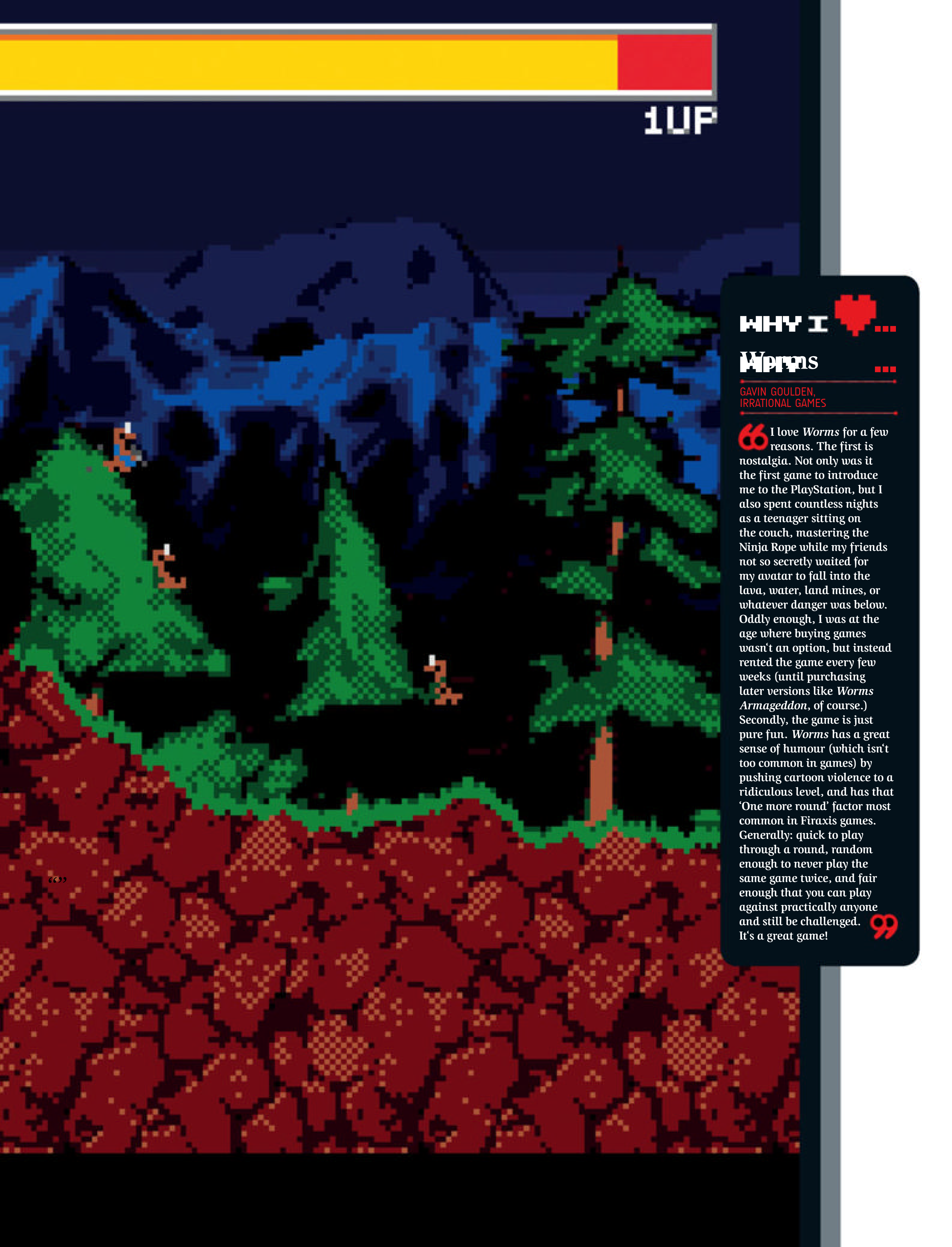


Above: *Gunslinger* manages to make the old six-shooter feel weighty, powerful and endlessly satisfying.



"Worms has a great sense of humour by pushing cartoon violence to a ridiculous level, and has that 'One more round' factor"

GAVIN GOULDEN, IRRATIONAL GAMES



WHY I ♥... Worms

GAVIN GOULDEN,
IRRATIONAL GAMES

“I love *Worms* for a few reasons. The first is nostalgia. Not only was it the first game to introduce me to the PlayStation, but I also spent countless nights as a teenager sitting on the couch, mastering the Ninja Rope while my friends not so secretly waited for my avatar to fall into the lava, water, land mines, or whatever danger was below. Oddly enough, I was at the age where buying games wasn't an option, but instead rented the game every few weeks (until purchasing later versions like *Worms Armageddon*, of course.) Secondly, the game is just pure fun. *Worms* has a great sense of humour (which isn't too common in games) by pushing cartoon violence to a ridiculous level, and has that ‘One more round’ factor most common in Firaxis games. Generally: quick to play through a round, random enough to never play the same game twice, and fair enough that you can play against practically anyone and still be challenged. It's a great game!”

RETRO

NO.136 JULY 2013



140
THE RETRO GUIDE TO... STAR TREK

Going boldly through the videogame history of the quintessential sci-fi soap opera

DISCUSS | Have your say on all things retro on our dedicated forum **www.gamestm.co.uk/forum**


E3
Nintendo
UBISOFT
AGE OF MYTHOLOGY
ELECTRONIC ENTERTAINMENT EXPO
AMERICA'S ARMY
WAVE BIRD

THE MAKING OF E3

E3 didn't just spring from nowhere – it evolved from a growing industry and it continues to do so today. **games™** looks back over its 18-year history to discover why E3 started and where it is heading

1995 was a pretty good year for videogames. There was the debut of *Worms*, the sequel to *Tekken*, and several other sterling titles, from *Full Throttle* to *Command & Conquer* and *Destruction Derby*. PlayStation came to the shores of Europe, while Sega announced its new console, the Saturn. But great though these events were, for many in the industry and for a whole raft of journalists, the launch of the first annual Electronic Entertainment Expo was just as important.

It was the first time gaming had truly struck out, emerging from the shadows of the technology industry to stand alone in its own right. A staggering 18 years later and this well-known gathering still prompts a rather odd sensation in those who visit. Some remember the games themselves and can recall the keynote speeches and hardware unveilings, while others look back fondly on the parties and the personal events.

But there's one thing everyone agrees on: E3 is huge. Born out of an annoyance that gaming had only been playing a bit part at the Consumer Electronics Show in the Eighties and early Nineties, it began on 11 May 1995 and ran for three days in the Los Angeles Convention Center. This was a far cry from the basement of the McCormick Center in Chicago where it had been holed up as part of CES, and it satisfied those who were convinced that gaming was becoming too big a deal to be treated in that way.

"I am the person who had the idea for E3," declares Tom Kalinske, who had been president and CEO of Sega of America from 1990 to 1996. "The Consumer Electronics Show was a big, big deal in Vegas and it still is. It would attract around 100,000 people each year, taking over every hotel, and now, of course, the newer, larger convention centre. But in the early days, my perception was that the management of the CES kind of looked down on the videogame industry. You could tell that just by looking at where we were located, the space they gave us."

While gaming was growing in the early Nineties, the size of the videogames industry area at CES was not. When Kalinske spent one CES in a leaking tent connected to the main convention centre, it was the final straw. "It was just too much for me," he recalls. "I just said, 'We're never coming back here again and we're going to do our own show'." Sega then went it alone and began to form its own shows in partnership with the third-party developers who made licensed software for its consoles.

"Initially our go-it-alone show was really Sega, Sony, EA, a bunch of third parties and Activision. There was no Nintendo," says Kalinske. But others began to see that the CES was not working well enough for them either, and a new group was formed called the Interactive Digital Software Association, partly in response to a Senate investigation into videogame violence. Kalinske was very much part of this setup, and it was this group, which also included Nintendo, Sony and Capcom among others, that launched the Electronic Entertainment Expo. It was immediately seen as the place to showcase new software and hardware. "Suddenly what we had created became important and became the Electronic Entertainment Expo," explains Kalinske. "We decided on Los Angeles because we were in the entertainment business and the entertainment industry is located in LA and Hollywood, if you will. Los Angeles also had the facilities to hold what became a very large show."

EARLY DAYS

THE FIRST SHOW actually started early, and the day before the official launch in 1995 a series of press conferences were held. Nintendo, which had once enjoyed the lion's share of the market when the NES seized up to 95 per cent of all home console sales, already had its back against the wall thanks to Kalinske's inspired aggressive marketing campaign for the Mega Drive which had dented sales of the SNES. But with its market share now 35 per cent, Nintendo was expected to make a big announcement in 1995 to clamber its way back. However, it unveiled the Virtual Boy, which barely shook the room. It wasn't too surprising when it went on to become a major flop for the company.

Kalinske, on the other hand, made people sit up and listen when he revealed that the Sega Saturn was already being shipped to retailers in America. It would, he said, cost $399. "My announcement was very controversial," says Kalinske. "And frankly, truth be known, I didn't want to do it. I had a big fight with Sega but

DEVELOPER COMMENTS



In 1997 we had a setup for *Abe's Oddysee* that cost a fortune. I was so stressed out and burned out, and certain that no one was going to show up. No one was there when we opened the doors. I felt awful. But, not long after, the crew finds me and drags me downstairs because I needed to explain the game to someone waiting in line. Line? There was a line!? I was amazed, and when we got to the booth the line was huge. And who was in that line? Shigeru Miyamoto.

LORNE LANNING, CREATOR OF ODDWORLD



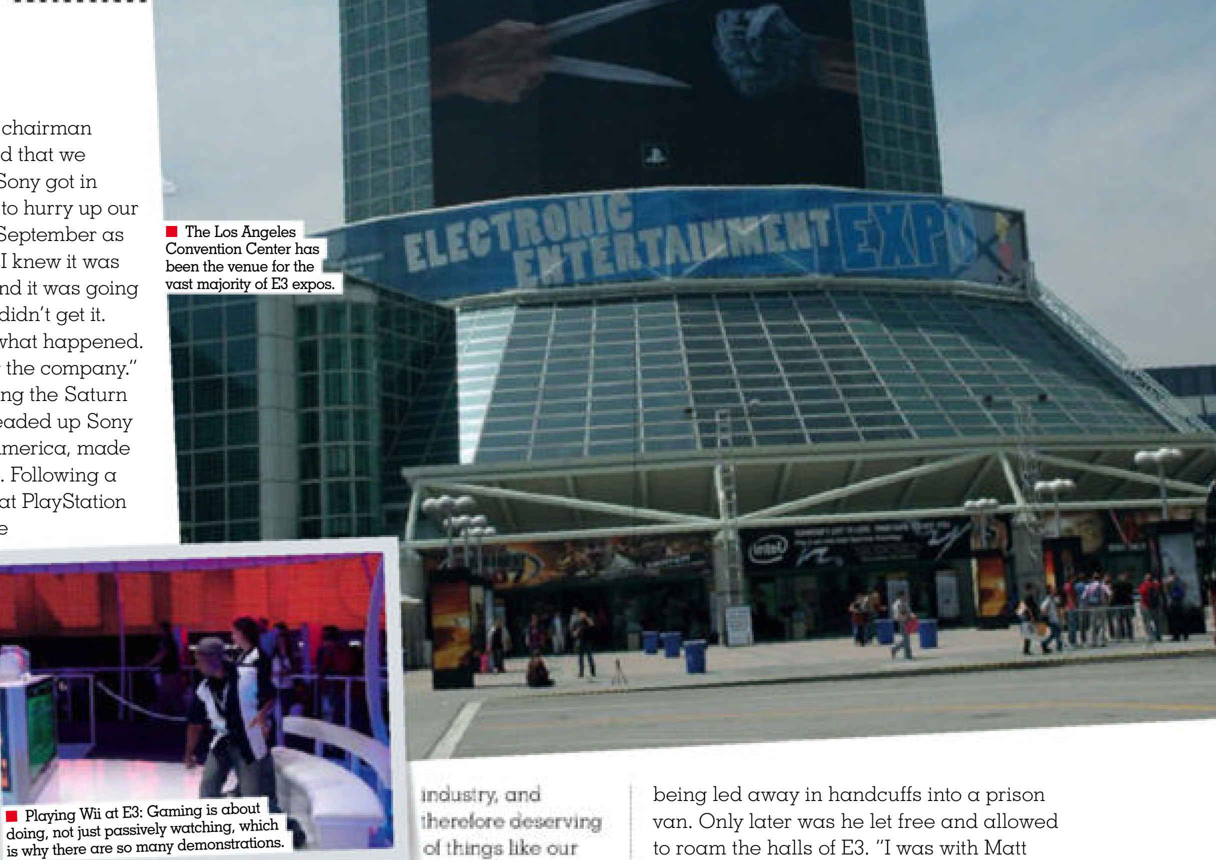
headquarters and the chairman of the company insisted that we introduce the Saturn before Sony got in with the PlayStation. We had to hurry up our launch instead of doing it in September as I was planning on doing. But I knew it was going to piss everybody off and it was going to really annoy retailers that didn't get it. And of course that's exactly what happened. It was very uncomfortable for the company."

Kalinske was right. Following the Saturn shock, Stephen Race, who headed up Sony Computer Entertainment of America, made an announcement of his own. Following a presentation, which stated that PlayStation would be released later in the year, Race was invited on stage to make a brief presentation about the price. And it was brief. "299", he said, simply, before walking off to rapturous applause and whoops that went on for some time. At $299, the PlayStation was hugely undercutting the Saturn's price point. The gloves were off and it made for a memorable start to E3.

In the following year, 1996, E3 was again in Las Vegas. The excitement of the Sega Saturn was no more at this point, the console having sold barely a few hundred thousand. This was very much the year of the PlayStation. Sony's machine had seared its way into the gaming conscience and it was beating other consoles hands down. Not even the announcement of Nintendo 64 earlier in the year and the showcasing of its analog stick at E3 was able to shake that.

Nevertheless, Nintendo gave it a good go. Its $249.95 price tag undercut even the PlayStation and the *Super Mario 64* cartridge that was bundled with it was enticing. Here we had an expo that brought with it *GoldenEye*, *Shadow Of The Empire* and the Game Boy Pocket. Sega tried to hit back with some 'Now $199' stickers but it was too late. To make matters worse for Sega, it was announced at E3 that the PlayStation would be the same price.

For Kalinske, it was time to leave the industry, the painful collapse of the Saturn and the rushed conference the year before having prompted his decision. But the industry, he says, was in fine form. "Nintendo had re-established the industry and in the early Nineties the industry was worth $10 billion," he says. "By the time I left in 1996, it was a $20 billion industry. So in five short years it doubled in size and became as large as the movie business. Suddenly, we were important in the entertainment industry, and therefore deserving of things like our own show, our own E3, our own association, our own rating system… all that stuff."



The Los Angeles Convention Center has been the venue for the vast majority of E3 expos.

Playing Wii at E3: Gaming is about doing, not just passively watching, which is why there are so many demonstrations.

FUN AND GAMES

EVEN THOUGH E3 had lost one of the key people who had helped it to form in the first place, the expo went from strength to strength. It became the must-go event for those who worked in the industry and, as a trade show that barred those who couldn't show documents proving their credentials, it was also seen as an exclusive club of sorts: one for the 'privileged'. And journalists.

So it was that the great unwashed from the press across the globe would descend on E3. Among them were journalists such as Matt Martin, editor of GI.biz, who told the Homeland Security officer that he was in America on assignment, which, unbeknown to him, meant he had therefore entered the States illegally. He was marked to an interview room, fingerprinted and mugshot before being led away in handcuffs into a prison van. Only later was he let free and allowed to roam the halls of E3. "I was with Matt Martin when he got locked up at LAX," recalls **Retro Gamer** freelance writer Martyn Carroll. "Funny now… it wasn't at the time."

And it is not just journalists who seem to get into scrapes. PR people do too. "Back in 1996, I tried to trade a *Grand Theft Auto* T-shirt for a *Postal* one and they weren't keen," says former Rockstar PR man Brian Baglow. "I also missed day one of the 2000 E3 thanks to food poisoning, before Rockstar persuaded me to catch the longest flight of my life to get out and present *Grand Theft Auto 2*."

But for all of the anecdotes, there is some serious work to be done. "We have a huge responsibility to the billions of consumers who watch and learn about our industry through E3 each year and our ability to keep the show current is largely due to our members and exhibitors," says Dan Hewitt, vice president of media relations and event management. "When you have the world's top game publishers and developers all in one spot unveiling the latest global trends

DEVELOPER COMMENTS



In the mid-Nineties we worked with Virgin Interactive Entertainment. I remember one journalist telling me in awe about meeting with Doug Johns, then PR manager, at the end of E3. They had an afternoon to kill. Apparently Doug suggested that they get a limo – the journalists assured him that this was a cliché. Not if we go down to Mexico with a stack of beers, he replied. And they did. The limo arrived, they bought vast amounts of beer and the driver took them to Mexico. After a crazy evening they rushed back to LAX where they just caught their flight.

CHARLES CECIL, DIRECTOR, REVOLUTION SOFTWARE

A TIMELINE OF E3'S EVOLUTION

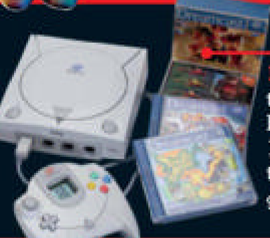
1995: A staggering opening which saw a console war erupt. Sega announced the Saturn was already shipping but Sony then unveiled it was selling the PlayStation at $299 – $100 cheaper.

1996: The rumbling excitement of the N64, Nintendo's $249 console, was continuing this year and eyes were on *Super Mario 64*, *Pilotwings 64* and *Wave Race 64*.

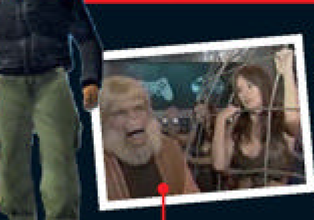
1997: An outing in Atlanta proved less enticing than Los Angeles for many attendees but there were some amazing announcements, from *GoldenEye 007* to *Oddworld*.



1998: Jeff Minter showed off the Project X version of *Tempest* but greater attention was aimed at *The Legend Of Zelda: Ocarina Of Time*. The 64DD was delayed.



1999: Back in LA, the Dreamcast was launched with a 15-game line-up and the Neo Geo Pocket got an airing.



2000: Sega impressed with its SegaNet reveal that gave a free Dreamcast internet connection on a two-year contract.

2001: *GTA III* was revealed but there were other revelations. Sonic found its way on to Nintendo, Sega having given up on hardware earlier that year.

2002: A great welcome – and major queues – for *Doom 3* and a major announcement from Sony: not a new console but news that PS2 had sold 30 million units.



2003: *Half-Life 2* and the PSP were announced. Nintendo floundered when asked how it would respond to this new challenge.



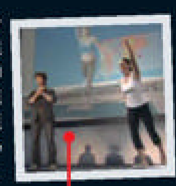
2004: Funnily enough, this year saw Nintendo showcase the DS. The PSP wasn't ready to be played. People were asking about *Doom 3*. *God Of War* looked good.



2005: *Quake 4*, *Call Of Duty 2*, *Alan Wake*, PS3, Xbox 360, and Revolution. There was a lot of buzz about the next-gen consoles.



2006: They called it Wii and people were still tittering. They wouldn't for long. Xbox 360 owners lapped up *Gears Of War*, PS3 faltered.

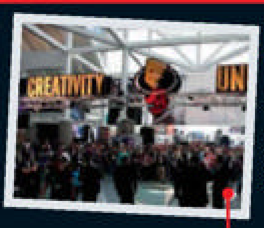


2007: In a smaller show than usual and with around 10,000 attendees, E3 moved to Santa Monica and the action took place primarily in hotels.

2008: Just 5,000 attended. There were demos for *Fable II*, *Resident Evil 5*, *Fallout 3* and the announcement of Wii Motion Plus.

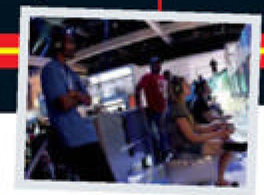
2009: Back at the LA Convention Centre, the format reverted to pre-2007 and 41,000 turned up to see Move and Kinect being revealed.

2010: Xbox 360 S model was announced and Sony gamers got PlayStation Plus. There was also an event held in PlayStation Home.



2011: The Vita, Wii U and *Halo 4* made sure E3 was losing none of its impact and was continuing to go strong.

2012: In a bid to protest against the introduction of the Stop Online Piracy Act (SOPA), a boycott of E3 was called and some decided not to go.



The first ever E3 went down a storm, especially when Sony announced the price of the PlayStation was going to be just $299. Cue lots of whooping.

and new products for the year ahead, you know you are witnessing the latest and most cutting edge the industry has to offer."

And yet mistakes have happened. In 1997, E3 moved to the Georgia Dome, Atlanta. In an area that covered a whopping 534,000 square feet, it was, in essence, six game conferences in one. It exhibited 1,500 new titles from 500 exhibitors. "But it didn't work well," says Kalinske. "I heard lots of bad reports about that, where the buyers just didn't like going to Atlanta and the show was not considered to be all that successful when there."

That said, it was still a mammoth show in terms of the games that were on display. *Metal Gear Solid* rubbed shoulders with a wealth of first-person shooters including *Quake II*, *Star Wars Jedi Knight: Dark Forces II*, *Half-Life* and *Unreal*. Sega, at this stage, was having a torrid time and its large booth was not getting much attention. Most eyes were very much on Lara Croft and the second outing of *Tomb Raider*.

The late Nineties continued to prove popular. Around 70,000 people attended in 1998 and they got to see games like *Gran Turismo*. Bands also figured highly, with the Foo Fighters belting out tunes for Sony and the B-52s playing at Nintendo's opening night. Parties were big, so it was little wonder that one of the standout announcements was Microsoft's three-piece speaker Digital Sound System 80 that retailed for $259.95.

"It was always amazing to see huge stands and the launches of new consoles," says Andrew Oliver, CEO of Blitz Games Studios. "But we also loved attending those launch events at the Kodak Theatre where they do the Oscars and going to the huge parties afterwards. Seeing big-name groups playing at the gigs like Black Eyed Peas was very loud, but very cool."

Back in LA in 1999, Sega was around with the Dreamcast, one of the most important consoles it has ever made despite its relative lack of success. Nintendo offered its GameCube and showed off *Donkey Kong 64*, while Sony was showcasing the graphics of the PlayStation 2. Games-wise, this was the year of *Final Fantasy VIII*, *Crash Team Racing* and *Quake III*.

DEVELOPER COMMENTS



In 2005, the best babes were the ones in the white tops and tartan skirts. But Nyko babes were scary this year. And special mention goes out to *Ryl*, the also-ran MMORPG tucked away in the Kentia Hall (home of wacky peripherals, retro game exhibition, media manufacturers and games that can't make it to the other halls). I think they overcompensated a bit for the inadequacy of the game – they must have had eight or ten babes in skimpy medieval-type garb, who at one stage were all flaked out on the ground outside the Kentia Hall.

BEN DEANE, PROGRAMMER, BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT



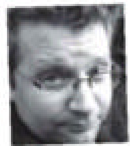
GEARING UP

E3 CONTINUED IN 2000. *Metal Gear Solid 2* had a strong impact and people craned their necks to see ten minutes of footage. The 100 millionth Game Boy was sold. PlayStation 2 would be launched later in the year. It was all about the numbers. "The popularity and significance of this event is reflected in the numbers," says Hewitt. "E3 serves a market that is worth approximately $25 billion in the US and each year E3 attracts over 45,000 people."

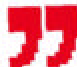
But these were also sober times, when people were reflecting on the media tie-up between *Doom* and the killers behind the Columbine High School shootings. That kind of media spotlight would fall again in 2001 when *Grand Theft Auto III* was unveiled. Baglow knew all about theft, too. "We were sitting having a meeting with a potential new partner on the Scottish Games stand when a horde of visitors came strolling over, on the lookout for swag," he remembers. "They came and stood, listening to our conversation, then tried to take the notebooks, pens, business cards, bottles of water and my mobile off the table because 'Why is it all on a stand if it's not there for people to take?'"

It is this meeting of gamers and games that marks E3 more than anything else,

DEVELOPER COMMENTS



■■■ My first year at E3, in about 1994/5, I spent the whole last day getting all the free stuff I could. I had to ask Dave Jones (founder of DMA) to buy a massive Nike holdall to carry it all. It took two of us to lift it. It cost another $100 in excess baggage and took around two hours for it to appear at baggage reclaim back in the UK, so I missed my flight to Scotland. However, it was worth it. I let everyone at DMA know there was swag on offer and it was like locusts descending upon a field to protest about unfair tax on chitinous exoskeletons. I didn't even get a sticker out of it, there was nothing left…



BRIAN BAGLOW, FORMER PR FOR DMA DESIGN/ROCKSTAR

and why you cannot take the expo entirely on the face value of the announcements and titles being showcased. Today's larger online presence means that E3 is more useful from a PR standpoint than for retail importance, which is the real reason it was set up and why publishers don't spend as much money on it as they did in the early days. "Back then, it was really important to beat the other guys and it was a very exciting show in the early days when we started it," says Kalinske.

And yet much has remained the same. There are still the lights, the crowds, the advert-adorned buildings, the overpriced food, the parties, and the games. *Doom 3* was the marker for 2002, but there was also *Metroid Prime*, *Red Faction 2*, *TimeSplitters II* and *Turok Evolution*. *Half-Life 2* lit up 2003, the PSP was set to blow away the competition in 2004 although Nintendo had other ideas with its DS, and 2005 brought unveilings of PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360.

"Every year at E3, major publishers and entertainment companies unveil their top products for the upcoming year," says Hewitt. "These announcements are so revolutionary, they have changed the way we experience home entertainment. Some of the biggest news to come out of our industry has been unveiled at E3."

He starts to reel off some pearls from Kinect to PS3 to Xbox 360. He also mentions PSN, Vita and 3DS. That said, the games were again centre stage in 2006 with *Wii Sports* being one that really got people talking.

SLIM PICKINGS

■■■ IN 2007, E3 slimmed down and moved to Santa Monica. "Every year we look at trends in our industry and assess the needs of our members and exhibitors to help us decide how to provide the best E3 platform," explains Hewitt. "In 2007, the E3 Media & Business Summit reflected those needs and we continued to focus on the business of our industry without the large trade show environment of previous years. The Summit focused on press events and small meetings with media, development and other sectors and successfully served its purpose at that time."



■ As well as professional journalists, bloggers and forum members are sometimes invited to E3. These shots, taken by Rodeo Games' Ben Murch, show the packed nature of the show.

Only 10,000 people turned up in 2007, and that shrank to 5,000 in 2008. Even so, Microsoft was on the ball with demos for *Gears 2*, *Fable II*, *Fallout 3* and *Resident Evil 5*. The Wii Motion Plus was announced and Sony had a demo of *Resistance 2*.

EVERY YEAR AT E3, MAJOR PUBLISHERS AND ENTERTAINMENT COMPANIES UNVEIL THEIR TOP PRODUCTS

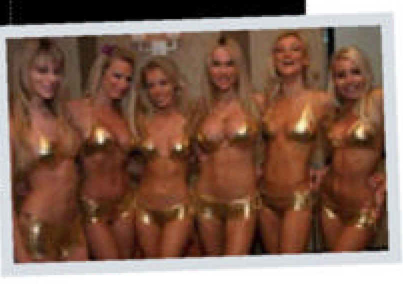
In 2009, the numbers boomed again, with 41,000 people attending. "Every industry sector is governed to a large degree by global and domestic economics and our business is equally susceptible," says Hewitt. "It also makes sense to us that we always listen to the needs and vision of our industry members and exhibitors since this is what helps us provide the most effective and efficient show platform possible." Which essentially means people wanted it to go bigger again. 45,600 attended in 2010 where the incredible *Legend Of Zelda: Skyward Sword* was unveiled. In 2011, the Wii U was announced and last year we saw titles like *Beyond: Two Souls*.

But quite how E3 will evolve in the future is anybody's guess. Ben Murch, co-founder of Rodeo Games, gives it a go. "There's a trend right now of larger publishers doing their own thing," he says. "Over the last few years everyone seems to have their own press conference. I wouldn't be surprised to see these conferences slowly evolve into mini shows. Lots of E3s slowly taking over Los Angeles in June! But E3 is really only as good as the products on show. So really the question is 'Where does the future of games lie?', and that's a whole different question."

AN E3 STAPLE TO FORGET

■■■ SEMI-CLAD women were used to advertise a whole host of games, but using sex appeal to sell games to the perceived stereotypical male audience rightfully became seen as unacceptable and patronising. The inclusion of "booth babes" at E3 was protested by several groups, their presence being seen as insulting to gamers, and a strong part of why gaming was often not accepted as a mature, adult activity. It got rather out of control. "At the E3 in 2002, we were in LA and we were constantly on the run from security with our own booth babes," says Vince Desi, who runs Running With Scissors, the developers of the *Postal* series. "We managed to slip into an empty room off the main floor and we did an on-the-fly *Postal* Babe photo shoot. There is no better way to bribe security than to have the *Postal* Babes pull their pants down for a close-up look. There were no weapons found and we were free to roam."

It was not until 2006 that the booth babes were banned, with tough penalties handed out, among them on-the-spot $5,000 fines. "What's new in 2006 is an update and clarification of the enforcement policies; as we do from time to time, we have taken steps to ensure that exhibitors are familiar with the policy and how it will be enforced," said Mary Dolaher, E3 Expo show director. It was an essential step in the industry being taken more seriously.





BEST BOSS

SHADOW OF THE COLOSSUS

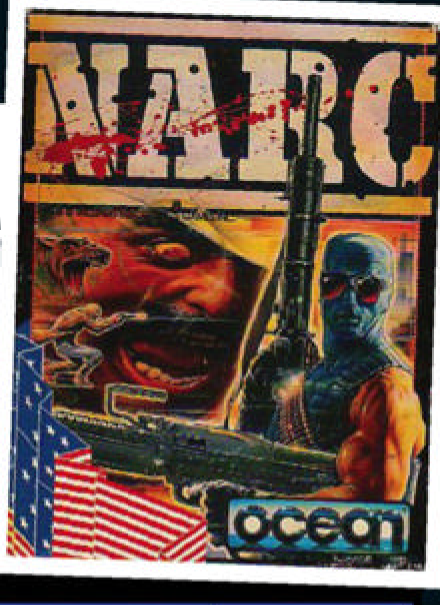
PS2 [Team Ico] **2006**

■ RIGHTLY VENERATED for its gargantuan cast of bosses, *Shadow Of The Colossus* is an experience of unparalleled epic proportions. The Phalanx battle is arguably its most memorable moment, taking place in a desolate desert plane with the skeletal creature bursting through the sand and soaring gracefully into the sky. What ensues is a breathtaking pursuit on horseback, with Wander puncturing the underside of the beast with arrows until it drops low enough to scale. Without disconnecting control, the player mounts the colossus, searching for weak points on its spine before landing the final blow. However, it's a victory tinged with remorse – without any provocation or hostile gestures, another incredible creature of the Forbidden Land is dead. We're sorry, big guy.



CONVERSION CATASTROPHE

The world's most embarrassing console ports, under the spotlight



NARC





ORIGINAL RELEASE FORMAT: **Williams Z Unit** YEAR: **1988** PUBLISHER: **Midway** DEVELOPER: **In-house**

SYSTEM FAILURE FORMAT: **CPC** YEAR: **1990** PUBLISHER: **Ocean Software** DEVELOPER: **Random Access**

WHILE MIDWAY FOUND itself upsetting parents and even a few tabloid newspapers with the release of *Mortal Kombat* in 1992, it was no stranger to dealing with controversy. *Narc*, which was released in December 1988, also found itself hitting the headlines for all the wrong reasons.

Though *Narc* had a commendable anti-drug message at its heart, the problem lied in the fact that this message was communicated by two videogame cops named Hit Man and Max Force who delivered cold justice to drug pushers, dealers and gang members using copious amounts of bullets and rockets. It's worth pointing out that players could choose to arrest the perps if they wished, but to do so to every one in the game would have cost a fortune in extra lives and required a week of play.

With its gritty yet vibrant digitised visuals, and enemies that turned into blood fountains and ash puddles, *Narc* had no difficulty in attracting gamers as much as controversy, and was soon targeted for home conversions because of its popularity and notoriety.

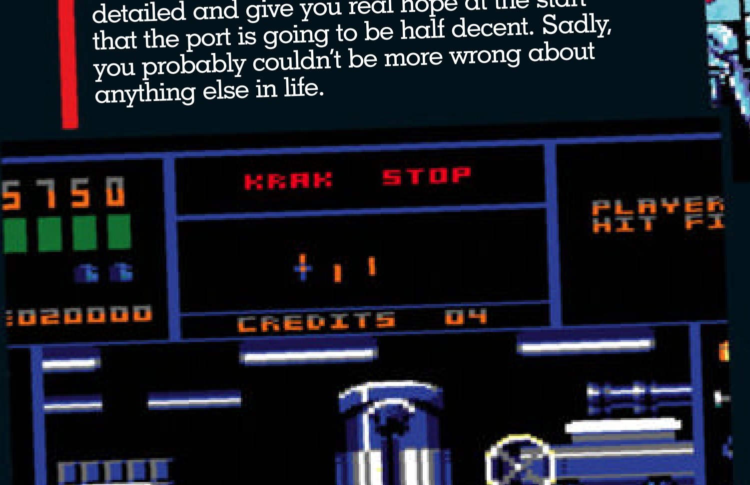
Ocean Software picked up the home computer rights and published several conversions for 8 and 16-bit home computers. The Ocean ports vary in their look and quality, but there can be little doubt in any discerning *Narc* fan's head that the Amstrad CPC version isn't the worst home port of the game.

While *Narc*'s gameplay (shoot people, collect evidence, shoot more people) is well captured, what kills this conversion is everything else. The sprites lack any definition and look like blobs of badly mixed colours. Get a few of them standing next to each other and they quickly conjoin to create a sort of sentient enemy jam that smothers and pulsates on the screen.

It also doesn't help matters that the sprites animate with the smoothness of a bi-plane full of razorblades in the midst of potent turbulence, and everything seems to move in slow motion all of the time. In fact, this conversion is so that bad that if you have the mindset that videogames are legal interactive pleasure drugs and you're looking for help to kick them, then this conversion could probably serve as a very effective cure.

THE BREAKDOWN

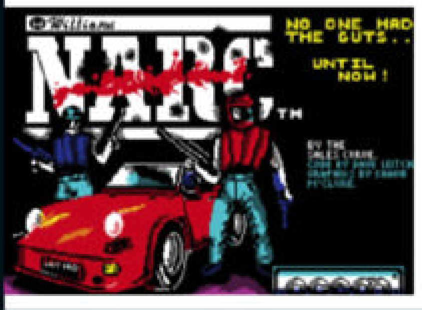
1 The mission briefing screens (shown here on the right) are by far the very best thing about this port of *Narc*. They look well detailed and give you real hope at the start that the port is going to be half decent. Sadly, you probably couldn't be more wrong about anything else in life.



2 Once you get into the actual game you soon realise there is no sound. No music, no sound effects, nothing at all… just silence. However, it will probably be accompanied by your constant yawning as a result of how slow and tedious this port plays.



3 The graphics, animation and collision detection are some of the worst we've ever seen in a coin-op conversion. It might shock you to discover that this car is in fact a Porsche in the coin-op version, and not an old banger that has been used to test the stopping power of a railgun.

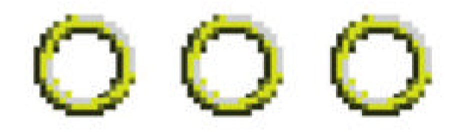




WHAT YOU SHOULD HAVE PLAYED IT ON

Format: **ZX Spectrum 128K** Year: **1990**
Publisher: **Ocean** Developer: **Sales Curve Interactive**

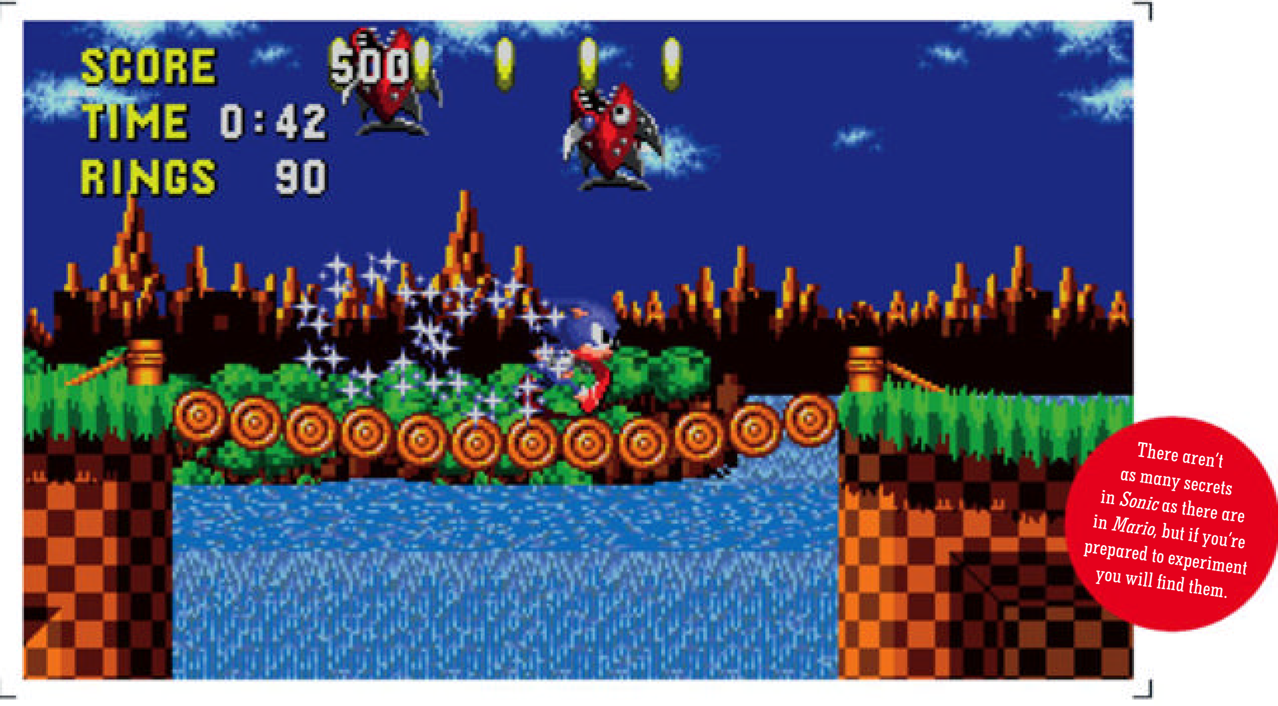
■ Despite the clear visual limitations of the platform, full marks go to this splendid ZX Spectrum 128K port. Though the scrolling is a bit slow and the graphics lack colour, it still looks stunning and its gameplay captures the feel of the coin-op pretty well too.



GAME CHANGERS

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG

Released: 1991 **Publisher:** Sega **Developer:** Sonic Team **System:** Mega Drive



There aren't as many secrets in Sonic as there are in Mario, but if you're prepared to experiment you will find them.

games™ examines the industry's most important videogames, looking at their influence and what made them so great in the first place. This month we take a look at Sonic The Hedgehog, Sega's answer to Mario

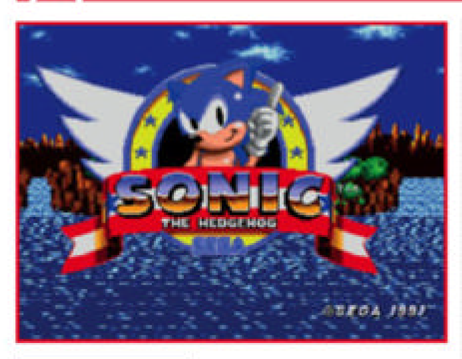
FLATTERY BY IMITATION is rife within the videogame industry, with one company often emulating the success of another to further its own success. By far one of the biggest examples is Sega's *Sonic The Hedgehog*; a franchise created to compete directly against Nintendo's *Mario* series.

Sega's Master System, while popular in Europe, had failed to make a big impact in the US or Japan, where it trailed massively behind Nintendo's NES. Sega already had a mascot by the name of Alex Kidd, and while he had starred in several popular games, he was no Mario. Wanting to rectify this, Sega had numerous developers submit character designs to its AM8 department and eventually settled on a creation by Naoto Oshima. It was a cute blue hedgehog who was then known as Mr Needlemouse. Created from a number of inspirations that ranged from the shoes of Michael Jackson to the blue of Sega's corporate logo, Mr Needlemouse was given a spiky 'can do' attitude that would appeal more to Western gamers. He was then handed over to Yuji Naka, who worked in the five-man AM8 development team that would go on to become known as Sonic Team.

Work began on *Sonic The Hedgehog* in April 1990, with Yuji Naka on main programming duties. The small team worked for just over a year, with Sonic finally making his debut on 23 June 1991. *Sonic The Hedgehog* became an immediate success, and before long it had replaced *Altered Beast* as the Mega Drive's pack-in game of choice. The same thing happened on Sega's 8-bit console, with the Master System version (which was completely different to the Mega Drive offering) replacing *Alex Kidd In Miracle World* on the Master System II.

MAGIC MOMENTS

SONIC IS FULL OF MAGIC MOMENTS. IF WE WERE TO PICK JUST THREE, THOUGH, THESE ARE OUR FAVOURITES…



THAT INTRO

★ FROM THE MOMENT Sonic rushes across the screen and 'Sega' screams from your TV, the character's iconic status was secured. It's further reinforced by Sonic popping up and wagging his finger, just to show you how Nineties he is.



CHAOS QUEST

★ REACH THE END of Act 1 or 2 with 50 rings or more and you'll be transported to Sonic's Special Stage, an awesome level that must be completed in order to retrieve the Chaos Emerald found at the stage's centre.



THE NEED FOR SPEED

★ THE SPEED OF *Sonic The Hedgehog* remains one of its best mechanics. It makes even more of an impact when you pick up the relevant power-up and can speed through loops and across collapsible platforms like a hedgehog possessed.

WHILE THE MASTER System version is an incredibly slick platformer, it's arguably the Mega Drive outing that helped give Sega a much-needed edge over Nintendo. The speed of Sonic was absolutely blistering, making Mario look decidedly sluggish and old hat in comparison. Sonic was cool and spunky and had a much-desired attitude that Nintendo's plumber simply couldn't match. Of course it also helped that *Sonic* was an exceptionally fantastic platformer, and while it lacked the depth of *Super Mario World* (which had debuted some seven months earlier) it was quite clear that there was nothing else like *Sonic* on any other system.

Even if you ignored the breakneck pace at which Sonic ran, there was no denying that it was an aesthetic delight. The abstract designs of Sonic's different worlds (known as zones) further set it apart from the generic-looking environments of many other platformers of the time. Green Hill Zone was full of sharp-edged trees and chequerboard hills, Labyrinth Zone had a distinctly Aztec styling to it, while Star Light Zone offered sparkling backdrops and huge loops to negotiate. Each and every one of Sonic's six main zones (split into acts) were full of detail and featured bright primary colours that perfectly complemented the high speed action that Sonic Team's game offered.

SONIC HAD AN ATTITUDE THAT MARIO SIMPLY COULDN'T MATCH

KEY FACTS

- Reach the end of an Act with 50 rings or more and Sonic gets the chance to collect a precious Chaos Emerald. Collecting all emeralds unlocks a different ending.
- The Master System version has a different story to the Mega Drive game, as it's set afterwards. It still features Dr Robotnik, but many of the zones are completely different in design.
- Such was the success of the Mega Drive pack-in that it enabled Sega to overtake Nintendo's market share for the first time in six years. In 1991 Sega counted for 65 per cent of the console market.

And yet there was more to Sonic than simply moving as fast as possible. While some would later go on to complain that the game was simply about 'pressing right and jumping at the right moment', the level design proved to be as every bit as memorable as *Sonic*'s glorious visuals. Although the levels lacked the sheer depth and variety that *Mario* games offered, they still proved a joy to navigate. Let Sonic explore his environments instead of simply racing through them and you soon discover all sorts of delightful secrets tucked away that would lead to rings and various power-ups.

The rings were also a key aspect of *Sonic*'s appeal, being a way of earning extra lives or acting as a useful shield. Whenever Sonic hit an enemy he would drop rings if he was carrying them, allowing him to quickly recover any before they disappeared completely. Hit an enemy without them, however, and he's robbed of a life. It's a neat mechanic that still holds up brilliantly today and remains a key component of practically every *Sonic* game since.

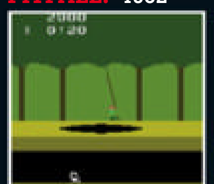
Equally memorable was Sonic's nemesis, Dr Robotnik, who would attack Sonic at the end of each final zone with all kinds of crazy contraptions, only to flee in terror when he was finally bested. As Bowser was for Mario, Dr Robotnik proved to be the perfect foil for Sega's new mascot and has hassled him ever since, gaining even more outlandish machines as console technology has continued to grow in power.

With *Sonic The Hedgehog*, Sonic Team created an unforgettable platformer that built on the DNA of past games but left its own distinct blueprint for others to follow. Even now, some 22 years after its original release, numerous digital releases ensure that a new generation of gamers are still able to experience that 16-bit magic.

BEFORE SONIC

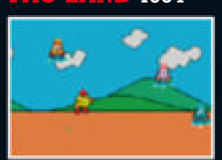
PLATFORMERS BEFORE SONIC CAME ALONG

PITFALL! 1982



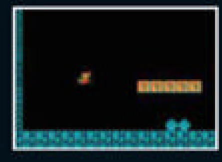
The ground-breaking platformer from David Crane was one of Activision's first big hitters and introduced many key mechanics that would go on to appear in later scrolling platformers.

PAC-LAND 1984



Interesting *Pac-Man* arcade spin-off that saw the iconic Namco mascot sprout legs and run through deviously designed stages on his quest to enter Fairyland. It was later ported to numerous home systems.

SUPER MARIO BROS 1985



Landmark release from Nintendo that turned Mario into a superstar and created the template for virtually every *Mario* game that has appeared since. It went on to sell over 40 million units.

WONDER BOY 1985



Popular arcade game starring a precocious prehistoric tyke who used a hammer and skateboard to rescue his beloved girlfriend. *Wonder Boy* later went on to spawn several sequels, including Hudson Soft's *Adventure Island* franchise.

NOTABLE SEQUELS

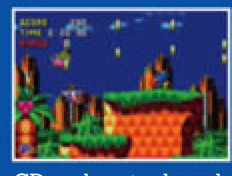
SONIC HAS APPEARED IN COUNTLESS GAMES. HERE ARE JUST A FEW OF THEM...

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 2
1992



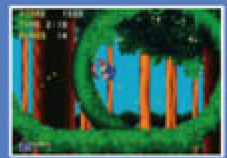
This masterful sequel not only improved on the level design, but also introduced sidekick Miles 'Tails' Prower. It's widely regarded as the best 2D *Sonic* – and rightly so.

SONIC CD
1993



This excellent platformer was originally exclusive to the Mega CD and centred on clever time travel mechanics. It's since been released on numerous digital systems, from iOS to PC.

SONIC & KNUCKLES
1994



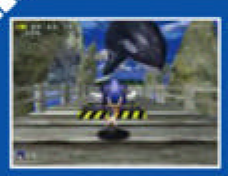
An experiment that featured lock-on technology to allow the first three *Sonic* games to be combined with it, creating effects like new levels or the ability to play as Knuckles.

SONIC THE FIGHTERS
1996



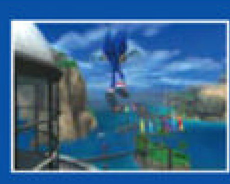
The concept is sound, but this is an atrocious beat-'em-up that does no favours to Sonic. He wouldn't appear in a decent fighting game until *Super Smash Bros Brawl*.

SONIC ADVENTURE
1998



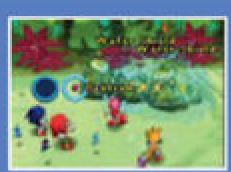
While it's somewhat ruined by an annoying central hub, the action stages of *Sonic Adventure* capture the insane excitement of the early 2D Sonic games.

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG
2006



Sonic's first next-gen outing was quite simply terrible, with bland level design, floaty controls and annoying camera angles. It marked the first appearance of Silver the Hedgehog.

THE DARK BROTHERHOOD
2008



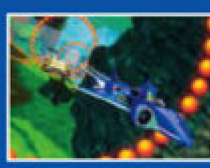
BioWare turns its hand to the *Sonic* universe with interesting results. The dialogue is a little twee, but it's saved by solid combat and an entertaining story.

SONIC AND THE BLACK KNIGHT
2009



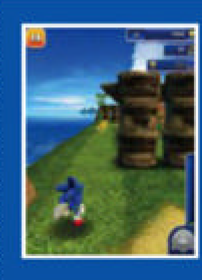
Arming Sonic with a sword sounds like another crazy gimmick, but this one actually works. The end result is a solid Wii platformer with a heavy focusing on combo chains.

SONIC & ALL-STARS RACING TRANSFORMED
2012



An excellent racing game that pits Sonic against other Sega characters. It improves on the original with better tracks and transforming vehicles.

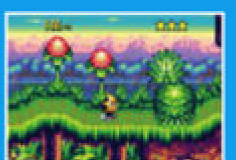
SONIC DASH
2013



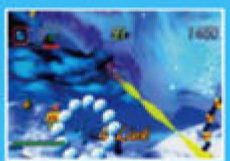
Sonic rips off *Temple Run* and, if we're honest, it makes for a far more entertaining game. There's a lack of levels, but it doesn't hurt your pocket with in-app purchases.

WHAT YUJI NAKA DID NEXT

NON-SONIC GAMES THAT NAKA HAS BEEN INVOLVED WITH



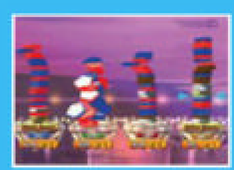
RISTAR
1995
■ This entertaining and charming platformer never gets the love it deserves. Naka was involved with *Ristar*'s design, once revealing that the main character had started off life as a rabbit.



NIGHTS INTO DREAMS
1996
■ A delightful score attack game from Sonic Team that produced a wonderful feeling of freedom and delivered imaginative boss encounters. Naka was a programmer.



BURNING RANGERS
1998
■ Superb 3D action outing from Sonic Team that sees the player putting out dangerous fires and rescuing trapped civilians. Naka was on production duties.



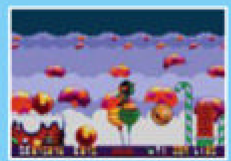
LET'S TAP
2008
■ Naka's first project after forming Prope was an interesting selection of mini-games for the Wii that saw the player tapping on cardboard boxes. The vibrations would then be picked up by the Wii Remote.



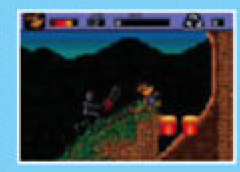
IVY THE KIWI?
2009
■ An interesting puzzle game where the player must guide Ivy to her mother by drawing lines that stop her from walking into danger. It's extremely similar to *Kirby: Canvas Curse*.

PLATFORM GAMES INSPIRED BY SONIC THE HEDGEHOG

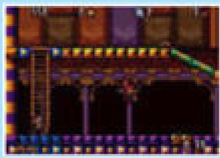
A SELECTION OF THE MANY GAMES THAT HAVE BEEN INFLUENCED BY SONIC. SOME GOOD, SOME BAD...



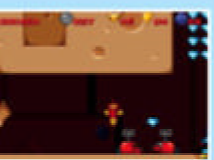
ZOOL
1992
■ Gremlin's Ninja of the Nth Dimension was as fast as Sonic, but the gameplay was nowhere near as impressive and it remains a poor alternative to Sega's popular hedgehog.



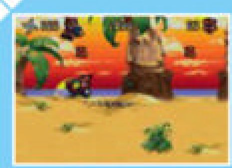
AWESOME POSSUM
1993
■ Annoying platformer with an environmental theme. It's a bad clone of *Sonic* with ropey gameplay and bland design. It did boast large amount of digitised speech, though.



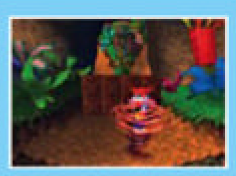
AERO THE ACROBAT
1993
■ Task-based platformer featuring a cute bat. He became a mascot for publisher Sunsoft and secured a sequel in 1994. An effort that's worth investigating.



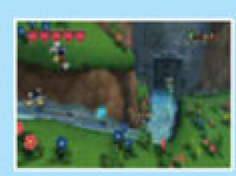
ALFRED CHICKEN
1993
■ *Alfred* is surprisingly good, mainly thanks to charming visuals and solid level design. A sequel/remake went on to appear on PlayStation in 2002.



ZERO THE KAMIKAZE SQUIRREL
1994
■ Zero was Aero's rival, but became big enough to get his own game. It's surprisingly decent as well, with Zero gliding to get around the large levels.



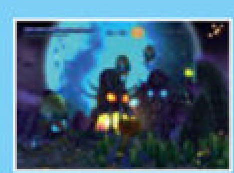
CRASH BANDICOOT
1996
■ Excellent 3D platformer from Naughty Dog that boasted incredible smart level design, great graphics and some truly jaw-dropping technical effects.



KLONOA: DOOR TO PHANTOMILE
1997
■ Excellent 2.5D platformer from Namco starring a cute long-eared cat that was remade on Wii. It remains a relatively low-key franchise.



PINOBEE: WINGS OF ADVENTURE
2001
■ This was a launch title for the GBA and starred a cute bee. While the levels are rather large, floaty controls and bland gameplay let it down.



SCALER
2004
■ An interesting oddity from A2M (not to be confused with Sega's AM2) that stars a chameleon who can transform into five distinctive mutant lizards.



RAYMAN ORIGINS
2011
■ Excellent reboot of Michel Ancel's popular hero that featured clever level design and truly stunning artwork. A sequel, *Rayman Legends*, is due later this year.

COLLECTOR'S CORNER

Your monthly guide to collectable retro treasures



DETAILS

FORMAT: Super Famicom
YEAR: 1995
PUBLISHER: Virgin Interactive
DEVELOPER: Rainbow Arts
EXPECT TO PAY: £200



EXHIBIT A: Though *Rendering Ranger* only saw release in Japan, much of the game is in English, making it safe to import.



EXHIBIT B: *Rendering Ranger* was designed by gaming legend Manfred Trenz, the creator of the popular *Turrican* series.



EXHIBIT C: With a reputed limited run of just 5,000 copies, *Rendering Ranger* is regarded as one of the rarest Super Famicom games.

RENDERING RANGER: R2

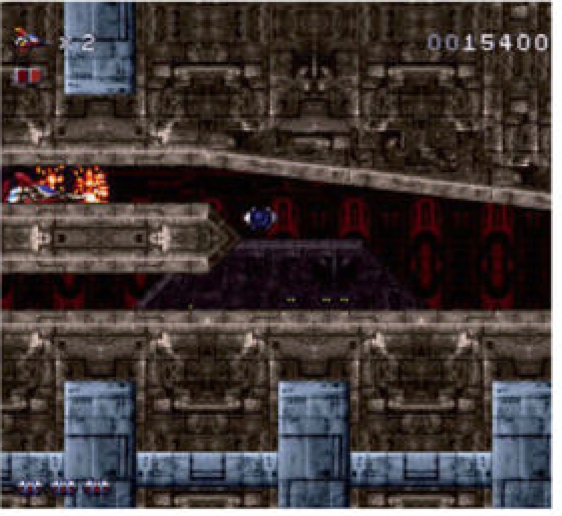
If you'd like games™ to feature you and your prized possession in Collector's Corner, email us at retro@imagine-publishing.co.uk

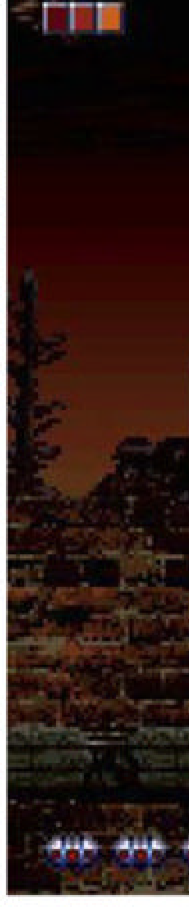
WHY IT'S RARE

RENDERING RANGER: R2 is considered to be one of the most impressive-looking shooters ever released for the Super Famicom. It also has something of a pedigree, too. Developed by the legendary programmer Manfred Trenz, whose impressive 8-bit gaming credentials include the C64 classics *The Great Giana Sisters* and the acclaimed shooter series *Turrican*, *Rendering Ranger* was released exclusively in Japan to the tune of (reputedly) just 5,000 copies by its publisher, the Japanese arm of Virgin Interactive.

With the game suffering from a delayed release as a result of it having to undergo some pretty major design tweaks (which included its visuals getting switched from hand-drawn to rendered sprites), it went completely under the radar of many Western gamers, and probably many Eastern ones too. Taking all this into consideration, it's no wonder that *Rendering Ranger* has become one of the most sought-after titles among collectors for the machine and that copies have been known to trade hands for serious sums of money. In fact, many collectors even regard *Rendering Ranger* as the rarest standard issue retail Super Famicom cart in existence – even lone carts are known to fetch a scary penny.







Worth Playing?

■■■ CREATOR OF THE *Turrican* series Manfred Trenz is regarded as something of a shoot-'em-up legend, and *Rendering Ranger: R2* does nothing to diminish his lofty status within the genre. It's a frenetic and challenging shooter with clear elements of *R-Type, Thunder Force, Turrican* and *Contra* in its design. It's also a technical showcase for the Super Famicom. Its screens are constantly bursting with varied enemies and explosive set-piece moments, and the action suffers from very little, if any, slowdown.

Split into two styles, *Rendering Ranger*'s gameplay also sets it apart from other shooters. The majority of its stages take place on foot while others take the form of horizontal spaceship shooter sections. Though the pace and design don't quite reach the brilliance of *Turrican*'s, its pounding soundtrack, stunning visuals, and frenetic and challenging gameplay means *Rendering Ranger* can still be considered an attractive curio for hardcore shooter fans as much as hardcore collectors. Nintendo's console wasn't known for offering tough fast-paced shooters, but *Rendering Ranger* proves that the machine, when in the right hands, was capable of delivering them with style and aplomb.



FACT!
R2 originally had hand-drawn graphics. They were altered as a result of *Donkey Kong Country*'s success.



I'VE GOT ONE

Name: **Mat Allen**
Occupation: **Support Engineer**

■■■ What is it about the Super Nintendo, and *Rendering Ranger: R2* in particular, that is attractive to you?
The Super Nintendo to me is the greatest console that has been released, where console gaming came of age and it had classics in all genres. The games have stood the test of time better than many later 3D titles have. In terms of *Rendering Ranger*, it was a Manfred Trenz production, and I've always liked his games – starting out with graphics on *Great Giana Sisters*, and then progressing to *Katakis* (*cough* *Denaris*), then the *Turrican* series.

Please tell us how/where you found your copy of *Rendering Ranger: R2*…
That good, old-fashioned, reliable source known as eBay. Having said that, I was specifically waiting for a copy that didn't go too mental in the bidding, although the prices at the time were still less than what some people have asked for the game today.

What condition was the game in and how much did you pay for it?
The game is in pretty decent condition, but not the greatest. The box and manual have obvious signs of some wear and use on them. I believe I paid 130 for it, which was less than I was expecting. Maybe that was why. Still, it's a complete copy, so I'm not complaining.

Do you use it and, if so, what do you think of it?
I have played the game in the past, and especially when I got it to check it worked without issue. I quite enjoyed it, but it isn't Trenz's best work in general, probably because it feels a little 'restrictive' after the open-area explorathons that the *Turrican* series provides. Just having side-scrolling levels was a bit 'retro' back in 1995.

Finally, would you ever consider selling it or is it yours for life?
Like most items in my collection, I don't see myself selling it down the line, but as always, circumstances can change. Part of the reason for buying many of these items is preservation, that someone actually owns them to keep for the future. Sentimental? Perhaps… but videogames in my eyes are worthy of maintaining just as much as films and music are.

THE RETRO GUIDE TO...



Stardate 2013.6. As JJ Abrams sends his Star Trek crew Into Darkness, **games™** dons a red shirt and boldly looks back at 30 years of licensed games...

GENE RODDENBERRY'S OPTIMISTIC sci-fi television show was cancelled after 79 episodes, but reruns, novels and merchandise sustained interest beyond its limited broadcast. Fervent fan devotion endured the show's minimal run (with some even organising a letter-writing campaign to name the first Space Shuttle 'Enterprise') spurring developers to bring Kirk, Spock and company's galaxy-wide exploits to videogames.

Five years after the original series launched, the earliest *Star Trek* game appeared on a mainframe in 1971, created by Mike Mayfield. The Enterprise explored a grid-based universe, killing Klingons and refuelling at Starbases. This was expanded by David H Ahl and published as *Super Star Trek* in his popular 1973 book *BASIC Computer Games*, with Paramount signing off permission to use the licence. The game appeared on many formats and inspired many imitators. Also among the first examples of *Star Trek* games is Gottlieb's 1971 pinball Star Trek (a.k.a Astro) – albeit not connected to the series. Later, For-Play's unlicensed *Star Trek* coin-op arrived 1972 – which was notably a clone of Atari's *Computer Space*, changing movement controls from multiple buttons to a joystick. However, 1979 brought the long awaited *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* and along with it Bally's official pinball tie-in.



1982 THE MOTION PICTURE

■ The first movie tie-in included enemies loosely based on Klingon and Romulan vessels in this first-person shooter. One notable feature was the black hole shortcut that allowed players to reach and destroy the mothership faster. Milton Bradley also released *Star Trek Phaser Strike*, a cartridge for its short-lived Microvision system.

1983 STRATEGIC OPERATIONS SIMULATOR

■ Released after *The Wrath Of Khan* as a dedicated cabinet or conversion kit. Synthesised speech welcomed the player aboard the Enterprise, controlled with a *Tempest*-style spinner. The screen was split between first-person vectors and the long-range map, with the Enterprise protecting the Starbase and destroying Klingons. The Nomad probe appeared on one level, laying deadly mines. Home versions included C64, VIC-20, Apple II, TI99/4A, Coleco Adam and Atari 2600, 5200 & 400/800/XL.





1985 THE KOBAYASHI ALTERNATIVE

■ Simon & Schuster published *Star Trek* novels and reference books, acting as licensing agent for many of these games. This text adventure represents Starfleet's replacement for the Kobayashi Maru training scenario – an attack on the USS Heinlein by Klingons. The parser included technical commands such as WARP 3, BEAM ME UP and Spock's Mind Meld.

1986 THE PROMETHEAN PROPHECY

■ This second text adventure saw the crew facing starvation after an attack. Beaming down to Prometheus Four, the landing party encountered a mythical alien species and negotiated for food.





1988 NETREK

■ The first team game played over the internet. Up to 16 players joined four teams named after races in the *Star Trek* universe, fighting with spaceships and capturing planets. The way the game used IPs, had tech to combat 'bots' and a constant player character were influential.

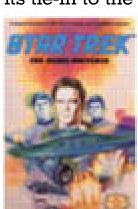
1989 THE NEXT GENERATION: THE TRANSINIUM CHALLENGE

■ The Enterprise-D investigates the theft of the vital mineral transinium by terrorists. This icon-driven game featured grainy black & white digitised images and animated faces of the crew.



1987 THE REBEL UNIVERSE

■ Developer Beyond announced its tie-in to the original series in summer 1986, but the take-over by Firebird and design delays (caused by the necessity to clear everything with Simon & Schuster) meant it was not released until the end of 1987 and at one point the late Mike Singleton was bought in by Firebird to help with design. Project manager Pete Moreland remembers some friction with the publisher: "There were cases where they would complain about one pixel or something." A myth has grown up that the length of Spock's ears caused a massive delay, but Moreland is adamant this never happened. A clever window system ('multivision') allowed quick access to different parts of the ship, including the teleporter for beaming down. The Amiga never got a conversion and the Spectrum version was never finished. Playtester Richard Hewison says, "Technically it was about as good as it could be on the C64, and the whole game was present and accounted for."





1988 FIRST CONTACT

■ Not connected with the later film, this text adventure had graphics for locations and sound effects for actions. The Enterprise carries diplomats to make first contact on the planet Gothica.

1989 STAR TREK V: THE FINAL FRONTIER

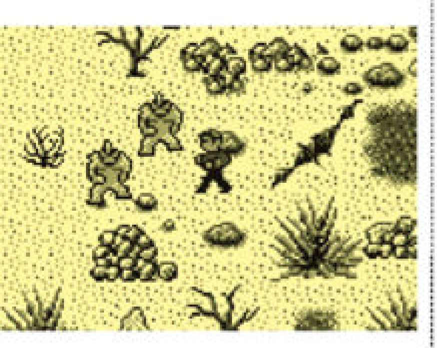
■ Following the movie's plot, the player controlled the Enterprise with a 3D view and took part in mini-games. The high quality VGA graphics didn't do much to detract from the poor gameplay.





1991 25TH ANNIVERSARY

Best remembered for its transporter effect, the crew disappearing from the pads at the back of the machine. Featured one of the first dot-matrix displays used in a pinball table, with sampled music and sound FX from the TV show.



1992 25TH ANNIVERSARY

A cut-down NES version of *25th Anniversary* had just four missions. The Game Boy title featured tactical ship combat and planet exploration (shown as scrolling overhead maps).



1993 JUDGEMENT RITES

Using the same game engine as *25th Anniversary*, a series of seemingly unrelated missions (with a new and original adversary, the Brassica) would test the crew. The enhanced CD version was the last appearance of DeForest Kelley as McCoy.

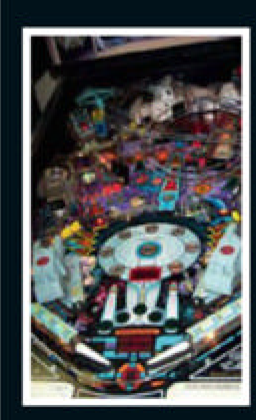
1993 THE NEXT GENERATION

Cadets took control of the Enterprise-D, with a digitised Picard giving mission briefings at the start. Completing missions successfully earned a higher rank.



1993 STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION

Long-term fan Steve Ritchie (see interview) stopped working on an *Under Siege* table to create this well-loved game. Eight different missions involved fighting the Borg, rescuing Starfleet personnel and confronting Picard's powerful adversary Q. The table featured models of a Borg cruiser, Ferengi Marauder, Klingon Bird of Prey and Romulan Warbird. The brilliant audio work included the iconic theme tune and a vast quantity of voice samples. A successful Kickstarter campaign gave Farsight money to acquire the licence and recreate the table for its Pinball Arcade app (iOS version shown here).



BEHIND THE SCENES: INTERVIEW: STEVE RITCHIE

Designer of Star Trek: The Next Generation pinball

Have you always been a fan?
Yes. I was 16 when the series started. It ran on Saturday nights, I would stretch out on the family room carpet and never leave that position until it was over!

Was it difficult obtaining the licence?
Our first meeting with Paramount did not go well at all: they demanded that we *not* depict any weapons or physical violence. I said, 'I am not going to make a namby-pamby game'. They did not know about the Prime Directive, but we did.

Fortunately Suzie Domnick [head of marketing at Paramount] was wonderful to work with, understood that we would do nothing to hurt the franchise, and said that we could depict violence as it was depicted in the show.

How did you plan out the table?
I drew the game originally, but worked with my team consisting of Dwight Sullivan, Greg Freres, Dan Forden, Scott Slomiany, and Carl Biaggi. Dwight, Greg, Dan and myself worked together to create the scripts, missions, actor's speech, and music for the game.

Did you come up with new parts for the table?
Many new items were designed from scratch on the *ST:TNG*, and that's true for every game I have ever made. The subterranean troughs and diverter system were worthy of a patent.

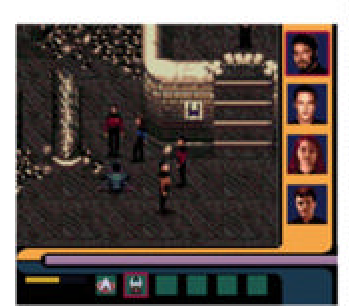
Did you meet the cast?
Dan Forden met and spoke to all of them as he directed the actors for our recordings. Patrick Stewart improvised a bunch of statements that were great, and found and corrected an error in our script. Brent Spiner, Michael Dorn and Levar Burton were also spectacular performers for us. John De Lancie was also great as Q, and a master of his character.





1994 STARFLEET ACADEMY STARSHIP BRIDGE SIMULATOR

■ Cadet David Forester leads his group through training missions at the Academy, including the Kobayashi Maru scenario. Polygon graphics, in a small window, portray the action. While it was difficult to control, it laid the groundwork for the later PC game.



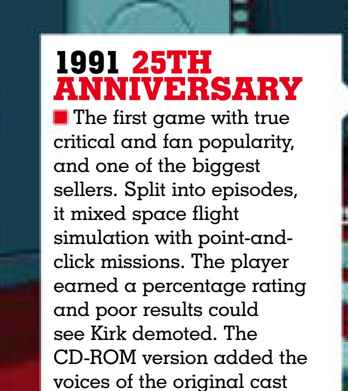
1994 THE NEXT GENERATION: FUTURE'S PAST & ECHOES FROM THE PAST

■ Linked to *A Final Unity*, the SNES and Sega versions have a similar plot based around the Chodak but differences in gameplay. The Mega Drive lacks Dr Crusher's medikit, while the SNES omits choices during diplomatic conversations. Members of the development team featured as crew members.



1994 GENERATIONS: BEYOND THE NEXUS

■ Based on the movie, like the previous Game Boy title it provided space flight and away missions viewed from overhead.



1991 25TH ANNIVERSARY

■ The first game with true critical and fan popularity, and one of the biggest sellers. Split into episodes, it mixed space flight simulation with point-and-click missions. The player earned a percentage rating and poor results could see Kirk demoted. The CD-ROM version added the voices of the original cast and a tribute message to Roddenberry.

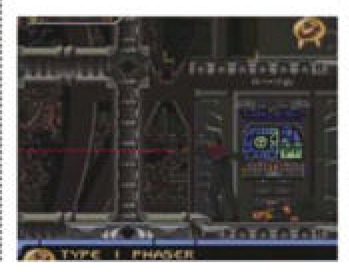
1994 THE NEXT GENERATION: A FINAL UNITY

■ Point-and-click adventure featuring Picard and his crew uncovering the Unity Device, hidden by the Chodak. Highly praised for its animated cut-scenes and voice acting, including Majel Barrett as the ship's computer.



1995 DEEP SPACE NINE: CROSSROADS OF TIME

■ The player controlled members of the crew in adventure and platform sections, fighting a terrorist threat to the station. Developed in Hungary to Maurice Molyneaux's design, using an early draft of the show's bible and the first six shooting scripts. Problems with Paramount's licensing saw parts of the game removed and the Mega CD version cancelled.





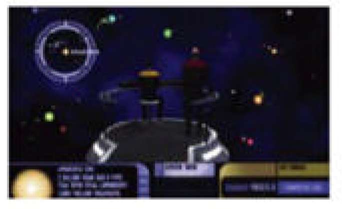
1995 KLINGON & 1996 BORG

■ Interactive movies featuring cast members and real sets, with the player's decisions affecting the outcome. *Klingon* sees initiate Pok avenging his father's death with the help of Chancellor Gowron, and came with an audio CD to teach the Klingon language. *Borg* has Q offer a young Starfleet cadet the chance to save his father's life ten years earlier, at the Battle of Wolf 359.



1996 DEEP SPACE NINE: HARBINGER

■ A mixture of adventure and tricky arcade sequences, players took the role of an envoy returning from the Gamma Quadrant to find the station under attack.



1997 GENERATIONS

■ Based around the film and featuring voice performances from the cast. The Enterprise was controlled from authentic-looking panels while away missions featured adventure and FPS elements. The Chodak from *A Final Unity* also returned.



1998 PINBALL

■ It had three simulated tables – To Boldly Go, Qapla' and Nemesis (not based on the film) – and was given a rough ride by the critics.



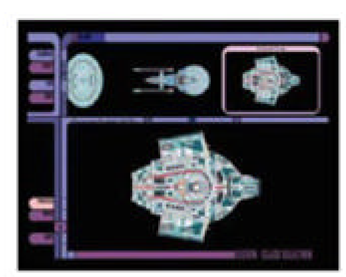
1998 THE NEXT GENERATION: KLINGON HONOUR GUARD

■ An FPS using the Unreal engine, *The Klingon Honour Guard* takes revenge for an attempted assassination of Chancellor Gowron.



1997-2000 STARFLEET ACADEMY & KLINGON ACADEMY

■ An expanded version of the earlier console game, *Starfleet Academy* featured famous instructors during its FMV sequences. The follow-up saw Torlek training to be a Klingon warrior. Set just before *Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country*, Christopher Plummer and David Warner reprised their roles.

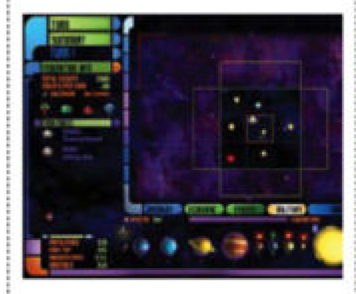


1998-2000 STARSHIP CREATOR I & II

■ Design, equip, crew and print out starships to take part in special missions. Designed with the team behind the reference books, the sequel allowed ships to be transferred to *Dominion Wars*.

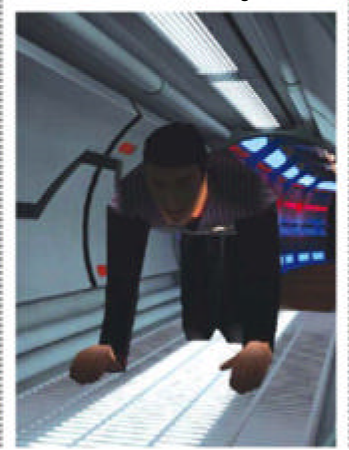
1999 BIRTH OF THE FEDERATION

■ Turn-based strategy game bearing a strong resemblance to *Masters Of Orion*. Diplomacy and combat are used to build a galactic empire for one of five starting races.

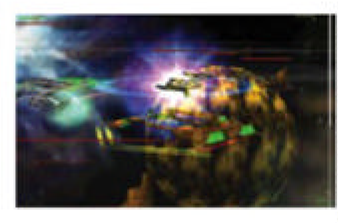


1999 HIDDEN EVIL

■ Set after Insurrection, Ensign Sovok (a human who has been raised by Vulcans) stars in this third-person adventure, which was criticised for its short length.



"WE KNEW THE FANS WOULD SAVAGE US IF WE GOT SOMETHING WRONG"



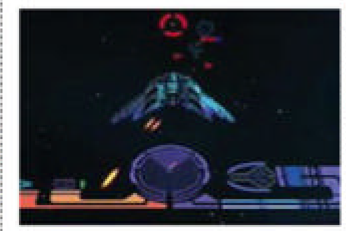
1999-2003 STARFLEET COMMAND SERIES

■ Based on tabletop game Starfleet Battles, pitting starships in tactical combat. Designer Eric Bethke formed Taldren to continue development, leading to Empires at War and its expansion Orion Pirates. The third game moved from classic Trek to the time after Voyager's return. A large modding community grew up around the series and its online multiplayer. Taldren closed after the third game but non-profit group Dynaverse Gaming Association holds the rights and hopes to develop a fourth.



2000 DEEP SPACE NINE: THE FALLEN

■ Third-person shooter using the Unreal Engine, based on the DS9 Millennium novels. Playing as Sisko, Kira or Worf, it was well received by the gaming press despite the lack of multiplayer.

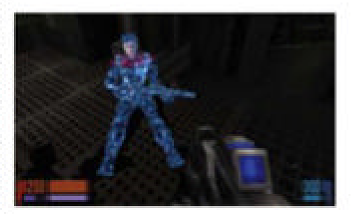


2000 INVASION

■ Warthog, best known for *Colony Wars*, took a similar approach for this title set in the Next Generation era. Ensign Ryan Cooper of the elite Red Squad flies small fighter craft against the Borg, Romulans, Cardassians and new invading species the Kam'Jahtae.

2000-2003 VOYAGER: ELITE FORCE & ELITE FORCE II

■ Raven licensed the id Tech 3 engine for this FPS. Ensign Alex Munro (Alexander or Alexandra, based on the player's gender choice) is assigned to the Hazard security team. Multiplayer featured game types set in the Holodeck for up to 32 players (the PS2 port restricted to 4). Ritual Entertainment developed the sequel. Munro (now just male) is assigned to the Enterprise-E. A sub-plot sees him end up with one of two female characters, based on earlier decisions.



2000 NEW WORLDS

■ Project Shiva causes a fight for territory between the Federation, Klingons and Romulans. Played in 3D, the Dreamcast port of this real-time strategy game was cancelled.



2000 DOMINION WARS

■ Portraying the Dominion War from DS9, players took tactical control of starship fleets in scripted missions and multiplayer battles. Poorly received due to bugs, many players preferred Activision's Armada games.





BEHIND THE SCENES: INTERVIEW: LIZ DANFORTH

Writer & mission designer of Interplay's 25th Anniversary and Judgement Rites

Did Paramount restrict the design in any way?
For the first game, we wanted to specifically make it the 'fifth year' of the five-year mission, the one that was never seen. Mostly we were told to do our own inventions, and to leave canon material out of it, which was a real shame. It was a decision I never really understood. We wanted to add to the *Star Trek* universe, but we also wanted to tie it in with things that had gone before, because it was logical that the fans would enjoy that. We also knew the fans would savage us if we got something really wrong, so we tried to make sure we got the details right!

Did you meet the cast?
No, getting the characters' real voices into the game was a surprise! I have a very embarrassing story to tell, yet also one that amuses the heck outta me. DeForest Kelley, struggling through some of the text I wrote, said the dialog was the worst he'd ever seen since the first movie! Because McCoy was actually my favourite character of the series, learning he said that utterly crushed me.

Is mixing simulation with adventure the best approach?
The story-based adventures were still relatively new conceptually. I think everyone expected that kind of storytelling in a game would be a big success – Wasteland had already shown the way there – but the starship segments would be fun and familiar, and (not coincidentally) break up the story blocks into having the feel of "episodes".

What was your main contribution?
The Harry Mudd segment was well received, and that was one of mine. Overall, it was being reluctant to say 'That's enough for this map, let's move on.' Mike Stackpole repeatedly chastised me to put in 'just one cool thing per map' but I always felt that left a scenario feeling too thin.

Kirk or Picard?
McCoy, of course.

2000 CONQUEST ONLINE

■ Tactical game similar to Risk, with each player an omnipotent Q controlling pieces (characters, weapons and starships) to capture an opponent's homeworld. Pieces could be bought, sold and then traded online.



2000 BORG CONTACT

■ The unusual cabinet had moving Borg heads taunting the player. The aim was to hold onto the rods as they shook, simulating an electric current.

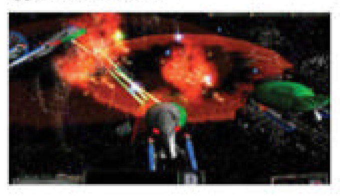


2001 VOYAGER

■ Only found in American arcades, this on-rails light-gun game was released after the TV series ended and also featured the experimental Delta Flyer.

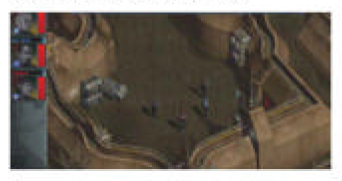
2000-2001 ARMADA & ARMADA II

■ Real-time strategy games set after the Dominion War. Single-player campaigns for four different races centred around the Borg invasion, while multiplayer battles are possible online. Modding tools expanded the options and game types available.



2001 AWAY TEAM

■ Compared to *Commandos: Behind Enemy Lines* with its isometric view, players controlled an elite away team. Team members are chosen for specialist skills, such as medical, engineering and tactical.



2002 BRIDGE COMMANDER

■ Totally Games moved from *X-Wing Alliance* to developing this starship simulator. Single-player centres on the USS Dauntless, uncovering a new plot against the Federation. Multiplayer and quick battle mode allow for modding.



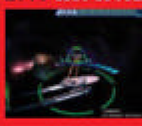
2004 SHATTERED UNIVERSE

■ Set in the 'mirror' universe, where the Federation was a brutal empire. Despite featuring both Sulu and Chekov (George Takei and Walter Koenig) in dual roles, this was critically panned.



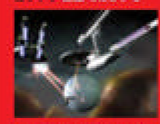
RECENT MISSIONS

2006 TACTICAL ASSAULT



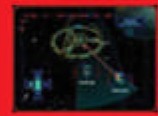
■ Campaigns for Klingon and Federation ships in this tactical game for handheld consoles, supporting local head-to-head multiplayer.

2006 LEGACY



■ Star Trek writer D.C. Fontana wrote the scripts, but critics disliked the mixture of arcade and strategy. A PC mission editor and mods are available.

2006 ENCOUNTERS



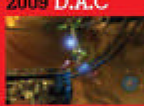
■ Fight with starships and take on missions from all five eras of Star Trek. The arcade combat received a poor reception.

2007 CONQUEST



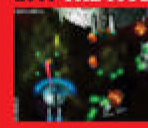
■ Real-time strategy set during the Dominion War. Players control one of six races, building starships to protect their homeworld.

2009 D.A.C



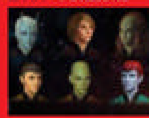
■ Based around the film reboot, players fight with spaceships over the three titular modes. DLC included new single-player Survival mode.

2009 THE MOBILE GAME



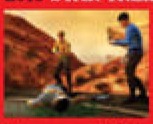
■ Pilot the Enterprise in a shoot-'em-up using the phone keypad or touchscreen.

2010 ONLINE



■ The official MMO, with free-to-play access as well as subscriptions. Become captain of a starship as the Klingons and Federation fight a new war.

2013 STAR TREK

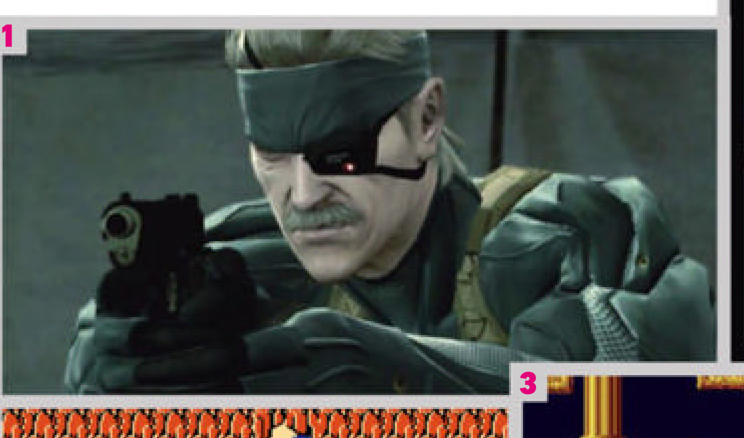


■ Set between the two JJ Abrams films, Kirk and Spock (in co-op) take on the Gorn. Features the likeness of Chris Pine and Zachary Quinto, story by Marianne Krawczyk.

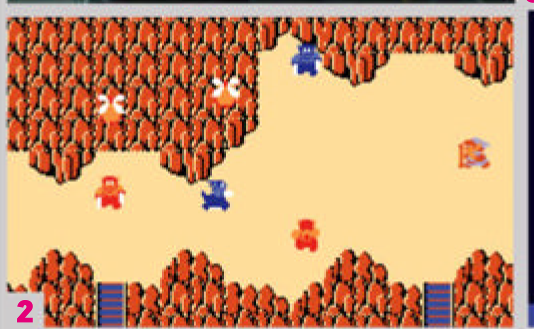
ESSENTIALS

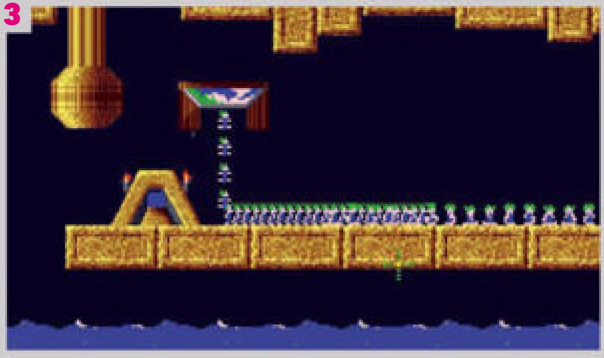
10 OF THE MOST INFLUENTIAL DEVELOPER

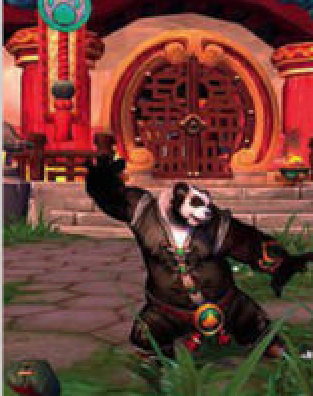
While it is easy enough to recognise the most popular franchises and best characters in videogames, we don't often enough celebrate the people behind the pixels. Here **games**™ presents ten of the most influential developers to ever grace the industry, and while it's by no means a definitive list, these ten are a group we have to thank for many of the experiences and mechanics we take for granted to this day.

1


4



2

3


5


Hideo Kojima
Notable Releases: Metal Gear Solid, Zone Of The Enders

1 For close to three decades now, Hideo Kojima has been pushing the envelope with his game design. His first major entry into the industry was *Metal Gear* back in 1987, a game that assisted in the formulation of the modern stealth genre, and whose influence is still felt throughout the industry to this day. He also put his mind towards the storyboard of *Policenauts*, and of course, developed the *Metal Gear Solid* series, proving that cinema and videogames can work in union. The world of interactive entertainment will forever be changed by Kojima's approach to game design – we wonder what he'll be making in ten years.

Shigeru Miyamoto
Notable Releases: The Legend Of Zelda, Mario

2 It's impossible to dispute Shigeru Miyamoto's place in history as the undisputed king of videogames. His CV reads like a list of the most successful videogame franchises of all time; *Mario, Donkey Kong, The Legend Of Zelda*... For over three decades Miyamoto has pioneered industry-shattering videogames, consistently innovating while introducing new ways for players to engage with and enjoy videogames. Miyamoto has had a hand in just about every Nintendo franchise imaginable, and even as he moves towards his 61st birthday, the legendary developer continues to be a driving force in the industry.

David Jones
Notable Releases: Lemmings, Grand Theft Auto

3 David Jones is responsible for creating some of the most addictive experiences in videogames in a career spanning two decades. The British developer co-founded DMA Designs in 1988, the studio that went on to create the *Lemmings* series and of course *Grand Theft Auto*, one of the biggest videogame franchises of all time. The 1997 release of *GTA* cast players as a criminal on the take from Liberty City, Vice City and San Andreas with complete freedom as to how the player sets out on their reign of terror. DNA later became Rockstar North, and Jones left to once again pursue his own venture with Realtime Worlds.

Hironobu Sakaguchi
Notable Releases: Final Fantasy, Chrono Trigger

4 A sign of a quality RPG was the Squaresoft logo adorning the front of the box, and that's all thanks to Hironobu Sakaguchi. The co-founder of Square pulled his company back from the brink of bankruptcy with *Final Fantasy*. The franchise has established many of the tropes found in modern RPGs, and the series has sold more than 100 million copies to date. Sakaguchi oversaw *Final Fantasy* in one way or another on instalments one to nine, over a career that's still going strong. Following the Square Enix merger, Sakaguchi left the company to open Mistwalker – which went on to create *Lost Odyssey* and *Blue Dragon*.

Rob Pardo
Notable Releases: World Of Warcraft, Diablo II

5 As the chief creative officer at Blizzard Entertainment, Rob Pardo has overseen development on numerous *Diablo* and *StarCraft* releases, but it's his work as lead designer on *World Of Warcraft* that solidifies him as one of the all-time greats. *World Of Warcraft* is still the largest massively multiplayer online game in the world, boasting over 12 million active subscribers, and Pardo was there at the start, carving out the lore, architecture, mechanics and systems of the wildly popular game. Pardo certainly didn't create the massively multiplayer genre, but he had a big part in honing and developing it.



Satoshi Tajiri
Notable Releases: Pokémon

6 Inspired by his childhood hobby of insect collecting, Satoshi Tajiri grew up to develop one of the most iconic franchises of all time. The 'Gotta Catch 'Em All!' phrase is known across the world, and it's down to Tajiri's persistence in getting *Pokémon Red* and *Green* out of the door. Six years of development almost bankrupted his studio, Game Freak, but 1996 saw the phenomenon take off. Mentored personally by Shigeru Miyamoto throughout the early stages of development, *Pokémon* put the adventure RPG genre into the hands of millions of players, while simplifying many of the genre's core mechanics.

Will Wright
Notable Releases: The Sims, SimCity

7 While Will Wright got his start in 1984 with *Raid On Bungling Bay*, it was his major role in the development of *SimCity* five years later that solidified his status as a pillar of the videogames industry. And if that wasn't enough, he later went on to launch *The Sims*, the bestselling PC game of all time. With this groundbreaking life simulation game, Wright managed to bridge the gap effortlessly between hardcore and casual gamers in a way that has never been replicated to such success. An incredibly intelligent designer, Wright has worked his way through the videogame industry for three decades and counting.

John Carmack
Notable Releases: Quake, Doom

8 John Carmack is considered to be a pioneer of the first-person shooter genre, and for good reason. Carmack co-founded id Software and took the lead programming role for such classics as *Wolfenstein 3D*, *Doom* and *Quake*. Carmack has always been at the cutting edge of interactive entertainment – in fact, the industry still utilises many of the precedents he set for using weaponry in a 3D space, with his engines used by the likes of *Call Of Duty* and *Half-Life* over the last few decades. He's still an active developer, but often spends time away from videogames to pursue his other passions – rocketry and engineering.

Shinji Mikami
Notable Releases: Resident Evil, killer7, God Hand

9 From licensed Disney properties to heart-attack-inducing assaults on the body and mind – Shinji Mikami has had quite the journey through the industry. Joining Capcom in 1990, it took six years before Mikami was able to unleash his terrifying vision for the future of horror games, *Resident Evil*. Later he worked on the series revival, *Resident Evil 4*, with the game's precision aim system quickly becoming adopted as an industry standard. From the demented scenes of *killer7* to the terrifying announcement of the next generation's *The Evil Within*, Mikami is still innovating and finding new ways to scare the hell out of players.

Sid Meier
Notable Releases: Sid Meier's Pirates!, Civilization IV

10 One of the few developers in the videogames industry to get his name in the title of his products, Sid Meier is often cited as one of the founding fathers of the videogame industry, what with over three decades of experience revolutionising the strategy genre under his belt. Meier co-founded Firaxis Games in 1996 and has become best known for series like *Sid Meier's Civilization*, *Sid Meier's Railroad Tycoon* and *Sid Meier's Pirates!*. Even when he's not leading the development of the games, they still carry his name to increase their marketability, such is his standing in the industry today.

THE VAULT



HALO 4: FORWARD UNTO DAWN

MANUFACTURER: **Microsoft Studios** / PRICE: **£17.75**

WHILE A *HALO* movie may never materialise, last year's *Forward Unto Dawn* is as close as we're likely to get to the realisation of that pipe dream. Starring Master Chief and a squad of disposable cadets charged with repelling a Covenant invasion on a military academy, the five 15-minute episodes have been merged into one feature length film for its DVD and Blu-ray release.

Despite its modest budget, *Forward Unto Dawn* is a compelling piece of standalone *Halo* fiction, but it also highlights the limitations of adapting the universe to the big screen. Master Chief is oddly the weakest link: the stoic, mythical Spartan stuck beneath an oversized bike helmet, lacking the charisma to succeed as a heroic protagonist. It's a wise choice then that the Chief has been demoted to a relatively supporting role; the focus instead is placed on a rebellious cadet within the academy.

The story doesn't stretch beyond run-of-the-mill coming-of-age territory (with aliens) and the script's wrought melodrama threatens to sink the entire production. But the second half rockets along at a riveting pace, squeezing every last dime out of its budget to offer a surprising degree of bombastic spectacle and quality VFX considering the production's limited scope.

It's doesn't pack the broad appeal that Microsoft might have pegged its marketing hopes on – and why would it? Especially when it abides so eagerly to the shooter's run-shoot-run-shoot template. But for fans of Bungie's universe, this reverential piece of action-packed entertainment is more than worthy of the brand.

GAMING CLOTHING



VAULT 101 SNEAKER

Say what you will about the residents of Vault 101 in *Fallout 3,* they sure are snappy dressers. Thanks to Bethesda's official Vault 101 sneakers, now you can be the envy of your post-apocalyptic neighbourhood.
www.tinyurl.com/bxn2hwz



TEAM FORTRESS 2 BLU LINUX T-SHIRT

You may not care that Steam is available on Linux now, but everyone cares about a penguin wielding a flamethrower. And we mean *everyone.*
www.tinyurl.com/bjurpkn



LEAGUE OF LEGENDS SINGED TEE

We looked high and low across the internet for the geekiest tee: lo and behold this *League Of Legends* design, highlighting the perils of a level 6 Singed. A worthy winner, you will agree.
www.tinyurl.com/c2yl82h

VELVET RABBIDS EEERZ

MANUFACTURER: **ARTOYZ** / PRICE: **£25**

AN UNUSUALLY STYLISH piece of Rabbids-related merchandise can be found on Ubisoft's official store. The idea behind these trendy vinyl creations is to demonstrate the sleek artistic versatility of the deranged horde of Leporidae (and at a premium price tag of £25, it's not for the jam-smeared paws of toddlers). The standard Eeerz feature 12 original designs from artists such as Cuypi, Jon Burgerman and Bunka, alongside a selection of five velvet Rabbids retailing at £40 a pop.



PORTAL 2 VINYL KEYCHAINS

MANUFACTURER: **THINKGEEK** / PRICE: **$12.99**

***PORTAL* AND THE** world of Aperture Laboratories has a stronger following than even *Half-Life* and the official merchandise out of Valve continues to feed the insatiable hunger of its legion of devoted fans. There have been other *Portal* keychains released, but none can boast the level of detail of these vinyl icons begging to be clipped to your keys. The keychain comes in four different flavours: a Companion Cube, Space Core, Turret or Wheatley. The Turret has a few impractical pointy ends, but you couldn't ask for a better reason to add some dangly bits to your pocket.



BRAVO COLLECTABLE MASK

MANUFACTURER: **EA** / PRICE: **$120**

IF YOU'RE A fan of EA's resilient *Army Of Two* franchise, then you should be ashamed of yourself. Why not conceal your face and celebrate your love for the 'dudebro' franchise all at once with this collectable Bravo mask. Retailing at a staggering $120, it's manufactured to a respectable high standard, with a high quality fiberglass shell and hand painted design, all built to withstand 500+ FPS Airsoft bb at zero range. Although a disclaimer advises that the mask should be bought only as a collectable item and not to be used as protective gear. But then, if you're an *Army Of Two* fan, you probably ignore all good sense and reason and just do whatever the hell you want.




gamesTM
MMO
The essential guide to the online gaming universe
WORLDS
154 INSIDE LOOK
RUNESCAPE 3
gamesTM is invited for a hands-on look at Jagex Games' overhaul of its enduring free-to-play success
160 INTERVIEW
DCU ONLINE
Catching up on the MMO's progress after going F2P
158 FEATURE
EVE ONLINE
Celebrating a decade in the stars, gamesTM takes a look back at the online phenomenon
A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO…
WORLD OF WARCRAFT
Everything you need to know about Blizzard's ubiquitous saga that defined the massively-multiplayer online genre
WEJ 2011



VITAL STATS

YEARS ACTIVE: 9
EXPANSIONS: 4
CURRENT ACTIVE PLAYERS: 8 million
MONTHLY COST: £8.99
PLAYABLE CLASSES: 11
ESTIMATED MONTHLY UK REVENUE: £18 million
CURRENT RAID BOSSES: 30
MAX LEVEL: 90
SERVER TYPES: 4
CHARACTERS PER ACCOUNT: 50
CHARACTERS PER SERVER: 11
POTENTIAL ACHIEVEMENTS: 1937
QUESTS: 12,369 (est)
ITEMS: 62,022 (est)
MAX GEAR LEVEL: 541
GAMES IN WARCRAFT UNIVERSE: 10

Beginners Guide

WORLD OF WARCRAFT

World Of Warcraft is fast approaching its ten-year anniversary, still standing as one of the most popular massively multiplayer online games on the market. It may not seem like it now, but Blizzard Entertainment took a big risk with *Warcraft*. Taking a step back from the real-time strategy genre that established the franchise and lore of *Warcraft*, Blizzard looked towards the booming MMORPG market as the perfect vehicle to let its players explore the world of Azeroth as they pleased.

Ultima Online may have been the first of note, but it was *WOW* that refined the mechanics and systems that have been woven into nearly every MMO to date, and the 8 million subscribers exploring, fighting and questing through the four continents of Azeroth are a testament to Blizzard's success.

For all its achievements, however, *WOW* can still be perceived as a rather intimidating beast for the uninitiated. Just as it was a core tenet for Blizzard in 2004, *WOW* is still incredibly accessible to new players, without compromising the depth or complexity the end game users have come to enjoy. A few hours spent with the game will have even the most inexperienced player coming to grips with their character, class roles and the various ways to play and enjoy Player vs Environment and Player vs Player content.

From tamely slaying Kobolds in Elwynn Forest to facing off against the mighty Thunder King Lei Shen, 89 levels later with two dozen characters by your side – the journey from zero to hero is a must-play experience.

For those looking to explore Azeroth, Blizzard offers the base game free-to-play up to level 20 – giving you ample opportunity to sample what each class has to offer. Once you're hooked, there will four expansion packs waiting for you: *Burning Crusade*, *Wrath Of The Lich King*, *Cataclysm* and *Mists Of Pandaria*. All expansions, except for the recently released *Mists*, can be obtained digitally or physically pretty cheap now – so you have no excuse not to jump into the fray and become the hero of an ever-evolving adventure.

Which guide would you like to see tackled next?
Let us know on Twitter or Facebook

Ease yourself into Azeroth
GETTING STARTED WITH WOW

HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

1 THE FIRST STEPS into Azeroth can be a little overwhelming, but they needn't be. Everybody begins with a few items of clothing, but it won't be long before you've got more purple loot than you know what to do with. The first obstacle to overcome will be realm selection. While *WOW* is home to millions of active players, the population is divided into several realms. This choice governs who you play and interact with, so if you are joining up with friends, be sure to check where they are before you jump in. For new players, we advise joining a 'normal' (PvE) realm and 'medium' populated server for the best experience.



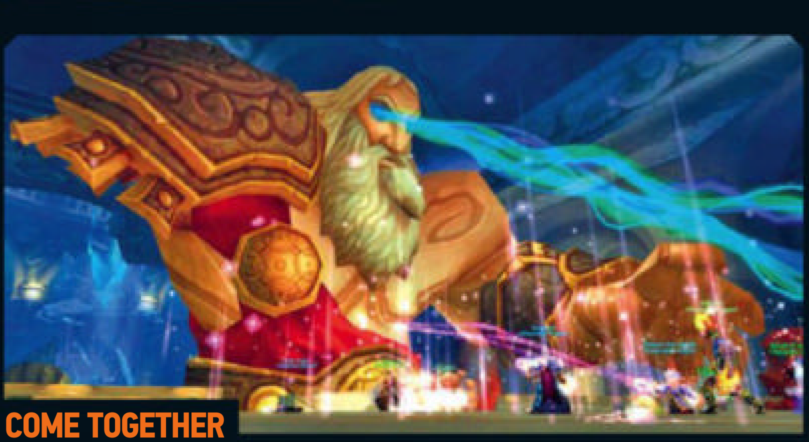
CHARACTER CREATION

2 YOU'LL NEED TO make two decisions that profoundly affect the rest of your experience within *WOW*: one is your race, and the other is your class. When picking your race, remember that this is mostly a social choice. Your race will determine your overall look, and your faction (Alliance or Horde) will determine who you are able to interact with. Your class, however, will determine the moves your character is able to learn and perform, and will later define your role in groups and dungeons. It can take a while to discover which you prefer, so we recommend creating a few characters to get a glimpse of what each has to offer – taking each through the first ten levels should give you an indication of what to expect.

QUESTING

3 QUESTING IS THE backbone to *WOW*, and will guide you from levels 1-90. With rampaging dragons, otherworldly forces and pesky Murlocks all vying for your heroic attention, there will be plenty to keep you occupied. Your first steps into Azeroth will be met by several golden exclamation marks indicating an available quest. These range from fetch quests and multi-part story arcs to kill quests. We advise that you pick as many up as you can, as several quests will point you in the same direction. The quest log provides updates on what the quest requirements are, while the map will highlight where you need to go to complete your active task.





COME TOGETHER

4 INTERACTING WITH PLAYERS is completely optional, though you'll be missing out if you choose not to. You'll always find other players eager to join your party, and this will help you complete quests faster, take on some of the tougher challenges and make some new friends. At level 10 you can enter a Player vs Player battleground, while at level 15 you can activate 'Dungeon Finder', which will put you into a group to tackle some skill-testing dungeons. Once you reach 85 you'll be able to queue into 25-person raid groups to take down some of *WOW*'s biggest monsters.

JOINING A GUILD

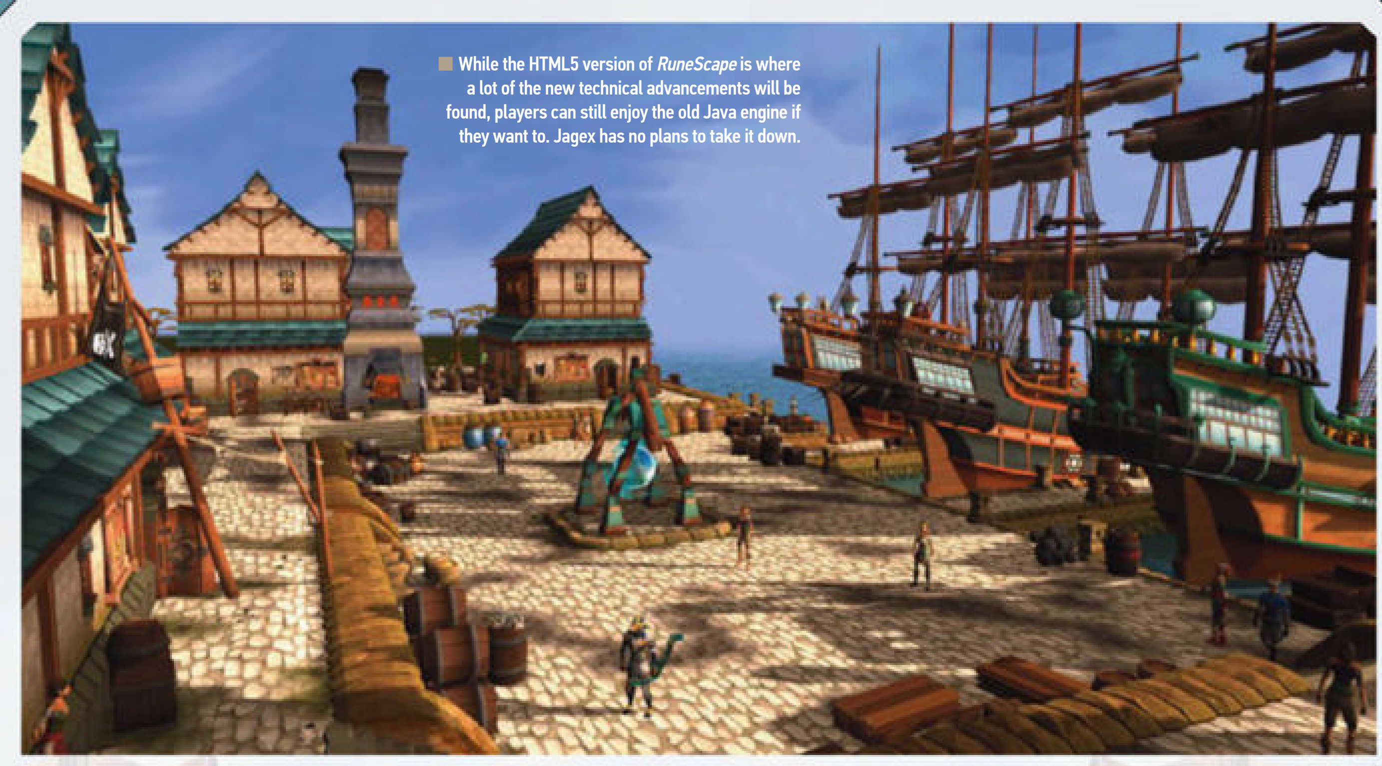
5 THERE'S NO CLEAR-CUT way to join a guild, though it's almost a necessary hardship by the time you reach level 90. It can be through searching on forums and chat windows, or you may perform excellently in a dungeon and find yourself being invited into a guild's ranks. Guilds provide the backbone to the endgame experience, opening up a world of challenging 10 and 25-person raids, as well as rated battlegrounds and Arena battles for PvP that are far tougher than those you can queue for in 'Looking For…' scenarios. Completing these tasks with your Guild will lead to some of the best and rarest items the game has to offer – not to mention forging some friendships for life.



BRAVE NEW WORLD

RuneScape 3

The world's most popular free-to-play MMO, RuneScape is heading towards its next evolution as developer Jagex steps back and hands the fate of Gielinor to the players



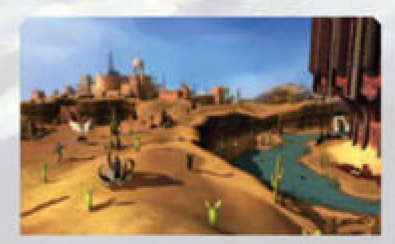
While the HTML5 version of *RuneScape* is where a lot of the new technical advancements will be found, players can still enjoy the old Java engine if they want to. Jagex has no plans to take it down.

It's easy to get swept up in the hysteria of *RuneScape*. After all, it has been with us for over a decade. Console generations have come and gone and MMOs have risen and fallen, but through it all, Jagex's fantasy RPG has persisted. Some will remember it as the world explored in a windowed browser while an IT teacher droned on during secondary school, while for others it was the motivation to get through a meeting that overran at the office. But for its 200 million registered users, *RuneScape* is an escape to another world.

Despite its success, *RuneScape* isn't traditionally a game that comes up in conversation. There's an underlying impression throughout the wider MMO community that a browser-based game is somehow inadequate in comparison to its client-based brethren – an ideal that becomes more outdated with every passing year.

When *RuneScape* launched in 2001, with its simple combat system and sprite graphics, browser inadequacy was an accepted deficiency. *RuneScape* may have been an escape, but it was by no means one with any real depth, with cheap subscription models and regular updates failing to create any real buzz among the hardcore MMO enthusiasts. By 2004, however, Jagex pushed the limits of its Java-scripted engine and released *RuneScape 2*. Shifting away from sprites and introducing full 3D graphics thanks to a new rendering engine, *RuneScape 2* was a positive step forward, though it still paled in comparison when standing alongside the recently released *World Of Warcraft*. "For many years, *RuneScape* functioned just fine on a 56k modem and ten-year-old computers. We [just] want to give consumers what they want," reveals design director Mark Ogilvie, as we discuss the pitfalls of trying to please every player.

Jagex worked tirelessly in the following years, building a strong community with a voice and a passion for the lore and design of Gielinor, the world in which *RuneScape* is based in. The studio has carefully listened to player feedback, based on which it has been steadily working towards its next major update. 2008 saw an HD top-down upgrade to the games visuals, while players received an 'evolution of combat' update in 2012 that brought the battle system in line with many modern MMOs, finally adding a hotbar and active skills into the fray. The biggest update in the history of *RuneScape*, however, is coming later this year, as Jagex finally has the tools to take its browser-based game into the next generation.



Jagex is putting a lot of power into its players' hands, letting them decide the outcome of the Sixth Age.



While it doesn't work perfectly just yet, Jagex is working on a mobile and tablet version of *RuneScape*.

"I think if you went to the boss of EA they would be quite condescending with what we do. I don't even care, I am very proud" **Phil Mansell**

Recreated in HTML5, the world of Gielinor has never looked so good. *RuneScape 3* is an opportunity to show the world what the 500-strong independent studio is truly capable of. "The power that we are giving to the players [in *RuneScape 3*] extends beyond simply utilising the power of the computer hardware, the power to create their own interfaces or even the power to take on the gods," says Ogilvie excitedly. "It gives them the power to decide how we, as a company, invest our time and efforts, too – almost like spiritual shareholders."

When we get hands-on with the HTML5-enabled iteration of *RuneScape 3*, it's immediately surprising what Jagex has been able to achieve in a browser. The camera drops behind our character, sitting above the shoulder and giving a new perspective on Gielinor. The HTML5 engine supports dynamic lighting, shadows, reflective water and an increased draw distance that will finally let players fully immerse themselves in the game world for the first time. It's yet another step closer towards a level of quality that we would happily accept from a boxed, client-based retail release.

MOVING TO MOBILE

WHILE *RUNESCAPE 3* is daring new territory for the fantasy RPG, the next step for Jagex is taking *RuneScape* to mobile platforms. It seems as if the core of the game was built with tablets in mind, despite being created 12 years ago. "We see tablets and other forms of devices in *RuneScape*'s near future. *RuneScape 3* brings us a step closer to our goal to extend the *RuneScape* ecosystem to any and all connected devices," says Mark Ogilvie. While the studio was coy as to when we could expect to see an iPad version, our sources say they have already gone to some of the UK's brightest mobile studios in an attempt to get the infrastructure functioning. We expect a reveal sometime in 2013. For now, we quizzed executive producer Phil Mansell on the transition.

[1] JAGEX IS EAGER TO MOVE RUNESCAPE ONTO MOBILE PLATFORMS, THEN?
"That's definitely in our long-term plan. I really believe *RuneScape* is going to work very well on those devices, certainly large form-factor devices like iPads. HTML5 is better architecturally to run on those devices than our old Java engine."

[2] COULDN'T I JUST BOOT IT UP ON MY IPAD AND PLAY NOW?
"You could, but you wouldn't enjoy it. Because we've made *RuneScape* for 12 years around pointed devices, which is fundamentally not how you play a touch game. The underlying grammar of the game will work really well on touch, but the interface… the front end doesn't yet, but it will do."

[3] WHAT'S THE BIG CHALLENGE TO OVERCOME?
"Our next big challenge [is] making *RuneScape 3* work beautifully with touch devices, and I really think we can do it. It's already a point-and-click move game, it's all about context sensitive interactions with objects and other characters. Architecturally it works, but it doesn't in terms of brilliant gameplay, not yet anyway."

[4] WHAT'S THE END GOAL?
"Our technical vision for it is one server – two front ends. We want it to be a different window into the same world. [If] you can have a Java player standing next to an HTML5 player, then you can have an iPad and a Nexus player standing next to them. That's the vision."

Technical fidelity isn't the only aspect of *RuneScape 3* that impresses; it is Jagex's commitment to the vocal community that has left us incredibly excited for the next chapter in the life of the MMO. "The narrative development for *RuneScape 3* is the most exciting area of change," says Ogilvie as he begins to detail the trendsetting future of *RuneScape*. "We are giving up the driving seat and letting players take the wheel. No game has ever given its customers that amount of power – the power to carve their names in the foundation stones of the game and change its future forever."

"We are keeping all of the passion and flexibility and freedom that makes [*RuneScape*] so special, but we are creating one glorious story that evolves in front of the players' eyes. Not as an audience, but as directors and principle actors who can change the way the show unfolds," says Ogilvie, while also adding, "Every single action the player takes will mean something and will have ramifications."

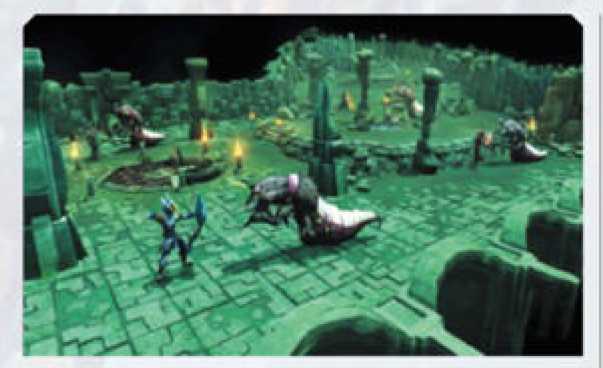
Utilising the weekly update schedule it has maintained for so long, Jagex is planning an episodic story that will evolve depending on player interaction and involvement. It's a mammoth task, but Ogilvie is certain that the studio is prepared for it. "The nature of our weekly content release schedule means we've always had the capacity to do something like this, to be reactive and immediate to our players' actions."

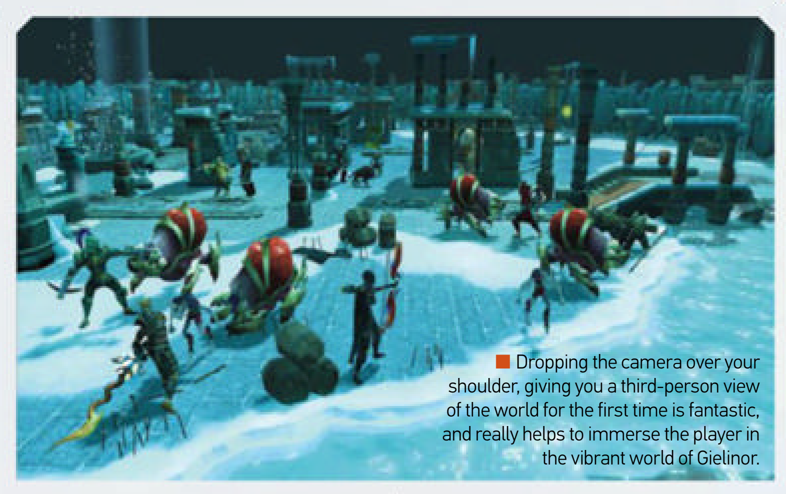
RuneScape has traditionally been difficult for new players to get into. Thankfully, Jagex is reworking the tutorials and early quests to help ease players into the world as the Sixth Age gets underway.

The landscape of Gielinor is rapidly changing following the death of Guthix, the god of balance, in an event earlier this year. The world is moving towards its Sixth Age as a plethora of gods flock to Gielinor in an attempt to wrestle for control over *RuneScape*'s vast lands and its people, and through this unfolding story players will be able to decide the fate of the world they have spent so much time living in.

"It's about capitalising on what we haven't done in the past," reveals senior narrative designer Dave Osborne. "What *RuneScape* has done [traditionally] is tell one story and then three years later tell a follow-up story. That doesn't feel like it is taking advantage of our weekly release structure; it's about designing stories that really capitalise on that."

Every week, players will be asked to respond to a new threat or disaster as the gods begin to descend on Gielinor. The way in which players respond will be catalogued by Jagex, and players are voting for the direction of the Sixth Age story as it unfolds. The tasks players





Dropping the camera over your shoulder, giving you a third-person view of the world for the first time is fantastic, and really helps to immerse the player in the vibrant world of Gielinor.

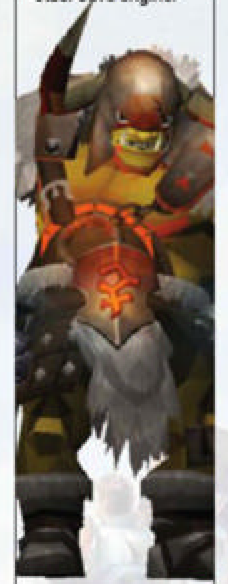
"For many years, RuneScape functioned just fine on a 56k modem and ten-year-old computers. We [just] want to give consumers what they want" **Mark Ogilvie**

complete, the gods they favour and the votes they cast on the official forums will decide how the narrative progresses – it's a massive undertaking by Jagex, but if the developer is able to deliver consistency in the ever-evolving story, it will be quite unlike anything else in interactive entertainment.

"Ultimately, what influence these gods have on the world will be up to the player themselves. Each world event from the launch of *RuneScape 3* evolves over the course of three months," reveals Ogilvie. "During these events the players, through their actions, will decide the future of the characters, the environments and the very being of the places that are a part of the *RuneScape* game world forever. Each event has a different theme and will require a range of gameplay skills. Players will literally be making history depending on the actions that they take."

Phil Mansell, executive producer of *RuneScape 3*, is sure Jagex can do right by the players. 200 million registered accounts is a lot of adventurers to appease, though he is confident that, as Jagex has been steadily moving towards fully integrating its players into the process for many years now, the Sixth Age story is the perfect vehicle in which to debut the unfolding narrative.

Jagex is looking towards a late summer release for the Sixth Age storyline, though it will run across both HTML5 and the older Java engine.



"To be honest, maybe we haven't been listening enough. We asked ourselves what *RuneScape* is going to do next in terms of really big cool stuff, but maybe we aren't the best people to make all the decisions. Maybe the players would like a go at this as well," says Mansell, adding. "They might really enjoy it and get really taken up with it. They might get more enjoyment overall of not just participating, but being part of the decision-making [process]. It makes a better game for them."

"People are passionate about it," continues Osborne. "For me, the fact that we can react so quickly to players on what they want from our game means we are in a prime position to react to that. If they want something, they can define it. For example, if we have a choice between what quest we are going to do next – pirate, gnomes or dwarf quests – we put it out to the players, and they make that choice for us. We are ready with three different briefs, ready to go straight into it. Because we are agile, because we are able to produce content at a reasonably fast scale, we are in a prime position to take advantage of that."

Whether Jagex is able to achieve its lofty goals remains to be seen, but it is in a better position than most to deliver a story on such a scale. From humble beginnings as a story of warring factions, *RuneScape* is evolving into a commentary on the world itself, and the passionate community is being given the opportunity to recreate the world around them. It is a truly ambitious undertaking, and somewhat unexpected, as a studio the size of Jagex isn't one you would commonly associate with having such dedication and direct communication with its community. But Jagex remembers its roots, and is taking this opportunity to challenge players and bring a new wave of members into the tight-knit community. If you haven't afforded *RuneScape* your attention in the past, then the Sixth Age is a good place to start.

"I think if you went to the boss of EA, they would be quite condescending with what we do. I don't even care, I am very proud," says Mansell, when we asked him whether corporate studios could attempt such a large undertaking. "We don't seem very indie because we are so big, [but] one of the best things about working at Jagex is we have full creative control. We can do exactly what we want. Small indie [developers] get to do that in their space, and very few people on our scale get to do kind of crazy stuff at times. It's nice, it's an obligation to just try because no one else can."

RuneScape 3 **will be available on PC later this summer.**



EMERGENT CONTENT



[1] Players will respond to a new threat, opportunity or encounter in the world of Gielinor, such as a monster attack or the appearance of a new god.



[2] Jagex will record player behaviour, such as what skills are used, choices are made, prizes are claimed and which gods are sided with.



[3] The community can consult with Jagex directly via forums and online polls, where the developer can also present quest and event options to be voted on.



[4] The choices made accumulate a shared vision for the world of Gielinor. The world will change accordingly, as maps and quests shift in line with player expectation.



[5] All of the weekly quests and narrative shifts will lead players towards a unique world event – the culmination of three months of hard work, before the cycle starts again.

EVE

THE SECOND DECADE

CELEBRATING TEN YEARS OF EVE ONLINE

Eve Online is celebrating its tenth year, and with subscriptions higher than they've ever been, CCP Games is in an excellent position as it begins to prepare Eve for the next decade



ve *Online* is quite unlike any other gaming experience available on the market. When CCP Games first opened the wormhole to the galaxy of New Eden on 6 May 2003, the MMO struggled to find its feet. Gamers were split, with some becoming enamoured with a world ripe for exploration, while others were turned off by the unconventional gameplay the space-sim heralded. Yet here we stand a decade later, with *Eve Online* healthier than ever before.

Growing consistently since launch, the 500,000-strong subscriber base is a testament to what a community-driven game can achieve. Still, *Eve Online* is considered something of an enigma for the industry at large. At its core, *Eve* is built to support a number of player approaches, whether your forte is combat or administration. Every aspect of *Eve Online* is built to encourage social play between its players – while you could go out alone, form your own corporation and make a living mining asteroids and trading with other small colonies, it's likely the operation would quickly get shut down by one of the larger factions who control entire regions of the Tranquillity server. For the seasoned gamer, *Eve Online* is often an exhilarating experience, but as time goes on, any new players will need to keep their heads down and adopt thick skin if they want any chance of integrating themselves with its living ecosystem.

INFORMATION

FORMAT: **PC**
PUBLISHER: **CCP Games**
DEVELOPER: **In-house**
ORIGIN: **Iceland**



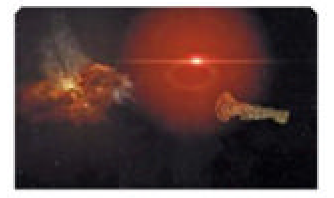
Unlike most other subscription-based MMOs, *Eve Online* continues to expand its world, hitting the 500,000 active players mark earlier in 2013.

Business is a dangerous game in the world of New Eden. The game features a fully functioning economy that fluctuates and bends much like its real-world counterpart. CCP stepped back from many aspects of *Eve Online*, instilling its players with complete control over the world and its destiny. The economy has been crashed on several occasions by corporate espionage. Huge space battles involving thousands of ships can warp the cost of integral warship materials, turning the tides of year-long wars between rival colonies, With tens of thousands of planets to fight over, the limits of *Eve Online*'s expansive player base are still yet to be fully tested. For the casual bystander, not concerned with pouring hours into trade federations and spreadsheets, *Eve Online*'s tales of deception and betrayal make for an incredibly interesting game to read about, but perhaps the most boring to play.

BACK IN 1998, when CCP Games took its first steps towards creating the ambitious world of New Eden, it could hardly imagine being at the helm of such an interesting social experiment.

EVE'S GREATEST MISDEMEANORS

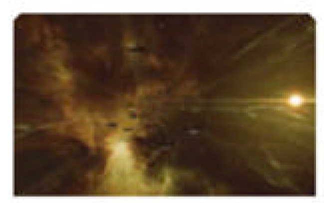
Here we track some of Eve Online's most important gameplay and social events that have helped shape the game over the course of its ten-year history



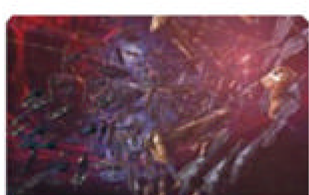
2003: EVE LAUNCHES
CCP Games released *Eve Online* to little fanfare due to issues with distribution. It received a mixed critical and commercial debut, though would quickly earn itself a devout following.



2008: A POLITICAL PARTY IS FORMED
CCP Games formed the Council Of Stellar Management. 66 candidates went for nine positions, creating an in-game democracy, giving players direct communication with the developers.

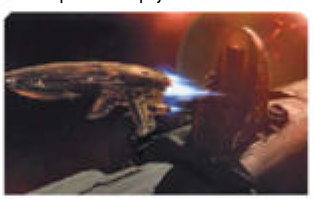


2010: WORLD'S LARGEST PVP BATTLE
Over 3,000 players clashed over territory in the LXQ2-T system after tensions boiled over between corporations. It prompted CCP to develop a system to effectively kill lag to allow for large scale battles in the future.

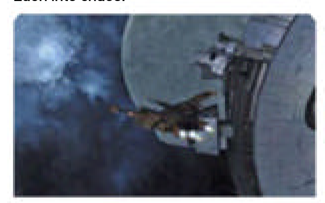


2013: BATTLE OF ASAKAI
One of the biggest unplanned battles in *Eve Online*'s history occurred after a pilot mistakenly warped a Titan warship into low-security space, prompting nearly 3,000 players to battle over its fate.

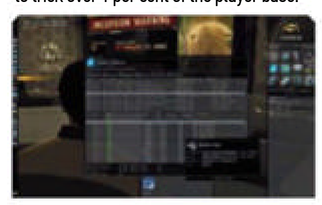
2008: STOCK MARKET CRASH
One of New Eden's largest banks, EBANK, was hit with controversy as its CEO was found to be embezzling over 200 billion ISK, which he converted to dollars and used to put a down payment on a house.



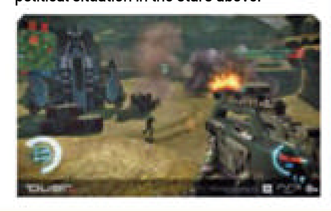
2009: POLITICAL SABOTAGE
GoonSwarm were able to plant an undercover agent into their rival's highest ranks. After years of planning, it took but a few minutes to throw the entirety of New Eden into chaos.



2011: THE $51,000 PONZI SCHEME
There have been some big heists in *Eve*, but nothing matches Phaser Inc's scandal that netted the trickster over 1 trillion ISK – over $51,000. A simple Ponzi scheme managed to trick over 1 per cent of the player base.



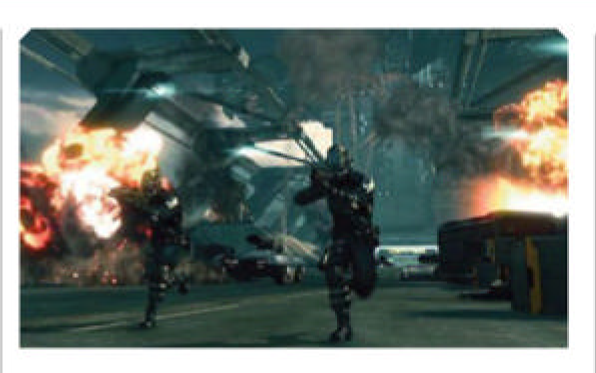
2013: THE CROSS PLATFORM EXPERIMENT BEGINS
Dust 514 sees its servers connected to the main *Eve* Tranquillity server. *Dust* players will be able to influence the economic and political situation in the stars above.



Struggling with money, the studio was forced to release a family board game (featuring the cross-dressing Mayor of Reykjavik), which went on to sell 7,000 copies in its native Iceland. The success of 'Hættuspil' enabled the company to hire artists, purchase equipment and begin to craft the world.

Now, CCP Games couldn't be further away from those teething issues. *Eve* is a globally recognised brand, and you only need to look towards Fanfest in Reykjavik to see what the company has achieved over its 16 years of life. Fanfest is the annual celebration of everything *Eve Online* related, and 2013 saw 1,400 eager pilots make their way to Iceland to meet fellow corporation members, talk over trade disputes and grab a drink with developers. Ten years of *Eve* has seen one of the most dedicated communities in interactive entertainment emerge, and it all came to a head when CCP Games created the Council Of Stellar Management.

The player-elected council represents the views of the players directly to the developers, bringing a real democracy to the world of New Eden. The Council are flown out regularly to Iceland to convene with members of CCP and can instil real change across the universe.



■ *Dust 514* lets players on PC and PS3 interact as the world of New Eden crosses over to consoles for the first time. The game is free to play and available via the PSN store.

With its own economical and political systems, *Eve Online* is a game where its players don't want an escape from reality – they want an escape *to* a reality, 21,000 years in the future.

2013 threatens to be *Eve Online*'s most important year yet, sculpting out the immediate future for New Eden. After a lengthy beta period the PS3's free-to-play FPS *Dust 514* has seen its servers connected to Tranquillity, and by the time **games™** reaches print the cross-platform experiment will be well underway. The actions of planet-side players will have direct ramifications on the debauchery happening in the stars above, yet another example of CCP's dedication to pushing boundaries of social gaming.

So the future is looking good for *Eve Online*. As its subscription numbers continue to climb, with new players desperate to get in on the regime-toppling antics that make *Eve Online* such an entertaining game to read about.

At Fanfest 2013, CCP Games demonstrated the global power its space-sim now holds. The developer demonstrated a tech demo dubbed EVR, which saw small teams taking to the galaxy equipped with Oculus Rift headsets for intense dogfights. CCP announced that a TV series adaptation drawing on user-submitted stories is in the works, as well as a variety of new features for existing players to enjoy. It might require some difficult first steps, but the next decade of *Eve Online* looks far too tempting to overlook.

> "Back in 1998, when CCP took its first steps towards creating New Eden, it could hardly imagine being at the helm of such an interesting social experiment"



GUILD CHAT

The most pertinent questions facing MMO developers today



Larry Liberty

Executive producer, DC Universe Online

After two years of superhero brawling, DC Universe Online continues to prove how MMOs can thrive on console. Discussing the evolution of its community of caped crusaders, **games™** talks spandex with executive producer Larry Liberty

It has been over two years since *DC Universe Online.* Looking back at the game's launch, what's your favourite memory of that time?

My favourite memory from the *DC Universe Online* launch would have to be the Blur intro movie that set the stage for the Brainiac/Future Lex/Future Batman storyline that is only now wrapping up in *DLC 7.* It's the stuff of comic fan dreams and something that I would love to see extended to feature length. If that ever happened, it just might be the greatest comic movie ever. I loved how beautifully it introduced all the new heroes and villains in the world of *DC Universe Online.* As a long-time comic book fan, I think it worked well as an epic storyline. Who wouldn't be interested in a story that sees Lex Luthor mysteriously return from a cataclysmic future to offer mankind hope in a war against an implacable foe set on omniversal domination?

Do you feel that there is a future for subscription MMOs on console?

I don't think there's a future for a pure subscription model. There could be exceptions, but I expect a hybrid or pure free-to-play model to win out, at least for the next few years. At SOE, we're 'Free to Play, Your Way.' You can truly enjoy the game as a free player, you can also selectively buy just the elements you most enjoy, or you can reap the full benefits of Legendary Membership and take part in all the game has to offer. I firmly believe that there are people that will never want a subscription, but are willing to spend money for content a la carte. They just want to feel like they're getting good value. I think we deliver that in spades. We also want to make sure that for our most ardent players, Legendary Membership represents the best value in the game. As to free players, they enrich our game. They are content for PvP, and they can be allies in PvE (player versus environment) content. They're our future customers, and are vital to our ongoing growth and health.

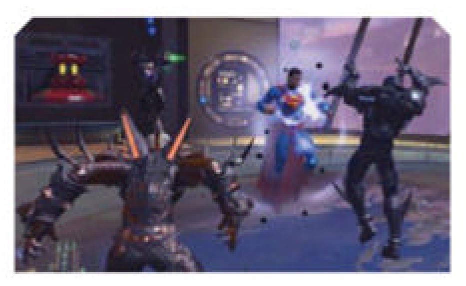
Has *DC Universe Online* conclusively proved the MMORPGs can work on console?

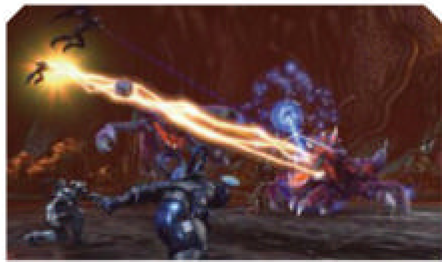
We proved that we could get a full-featured MMO onto the PS3 and that it could be very successful. The majority of our player base is on the PS3, and we get thousands of new players each day. Despite the challenges, we and our partners at Sony Computer Entertainment have learned so much about how to make this genre work better on consoles for years to come.

Having experienced the evolution of *DC Universe Online*, what's the main lesson SOE has learnt about creating MMOs for console?

It's difficult to narrow it down to one thing. We've learned how to work with Sony Computer Entertainment. They have become a great partner, and are genuinely interested in effecting change that will make their platforms work better for free-to-play titles. We also learned about the types of content that appeal to console players. Of course, we also have a much better understanding of how to optimise for a hardware specification that is a bit less flexible than the PC.

> "We proved that we could get a full-featured MMO onto the PS3 and that it could be very successful"





DC Universe Online has successfully built up an audience on PS3 – going free-to-play no doubt helped make that happen.



Imagine Publishing Ltd
Richmond House, 33 Richmond Hill,
Bournemouth, Dorset, BH2 6EZ
☎ +44 (0) 1202 586200
Web: www.imagine-publishing.co.uk
www.gamestm.co.uk
www.greatdigitalmags.com

Magazine team

Editor Samuel Roberts
samuel.roberts@imagine-publishing.co.uk
☎ 01202 586259
Editor In Chief Nick Roberts
Features Editor David Scarborough
Staff Writer Josh West
Senior Art Editor Greg Whitaker
Sub Editor Rebecca Richards
Photographer James Sheppard
Head of Publishing Aaron Asadi
Head of Design Ross Andrews

Contributors

Adam Barnes, Matt Bennett, Daniel Cairns, Dan Collins, David Crookes, Jon Denton, Alex Dantanus, Andrew Fisher, Dan Griliopoulos, Grant Howitt, Stuart Hunt, Darran Jones, Ryan King, Chris McMahon, Andy Salter, Kevin Scully, Will Shum, Sam Smith, Perry Wardell-Wicks, Jonathan Wells, Stephen Williams, Steve Wright

Cover Image

Advertising

Digital or printed media packs are available on request.

Head of Sales Hang Deretz
☎ 01202 586442
hang.deretz@imagine-publishing.co.uk

Advertising Manager Simon Catley
☎ 01202 586437
simon.catley@imagine-publishing.co.uk

Account Manager Anthony Godsell
☎ 01202 586420
anthony.godsell@imagine-publishing.co.uk

International

games™ is available for licensing. Contact the International department to discuss partnership opportunities.

Head of International Licensing Cathy Blackman
☎ +44 (0) 1202 586401
licensing@imagine-publishing.co.uk

Subscriptions

For subscription enquiries email:
gamestm@servicehelpline.co.uk
☎ UK 0844 848 8429
☎ Overseas +44 1795 592 864
13 issue subscription UK – £52.00
13 issue subscription Europe – £70.00
13 issue subscription ROW – £80.00

Circulation

Head of Circulation Darren Pearce
☎ 01202 586200

Production

Production Director Jane Hawkins
☎ 01202 586200

Founders

Group Managing Director Damian Butt
Group Finance & Commerical Director Steven Boyd
Group Creative Director Mark Kendrick

Printing & Distribution

Printed by Wyndeham Heron Ltd, Bentalls Complex, Colchester Road, Heybridge, Maldon, Essex, CM9 4NW
☎ 01621 877 777

Distributed in the UK and Eire by Seymour Distribution, 2 East Poultry Avenue, London, EC1A 9PT
☎ 020 7429 4000

Distributed in Australia by Gordon & Gotch, Equinox Centre, 18 Rodborough Road, Frenchs Forest, NSW 2086
☎ +61 2 9972 8800

Distributed in the Rest of the World by Marketforce, Blue Fin Building, 110 Southwark Street, London, SE1 0SU
☎ 020 3148 8105

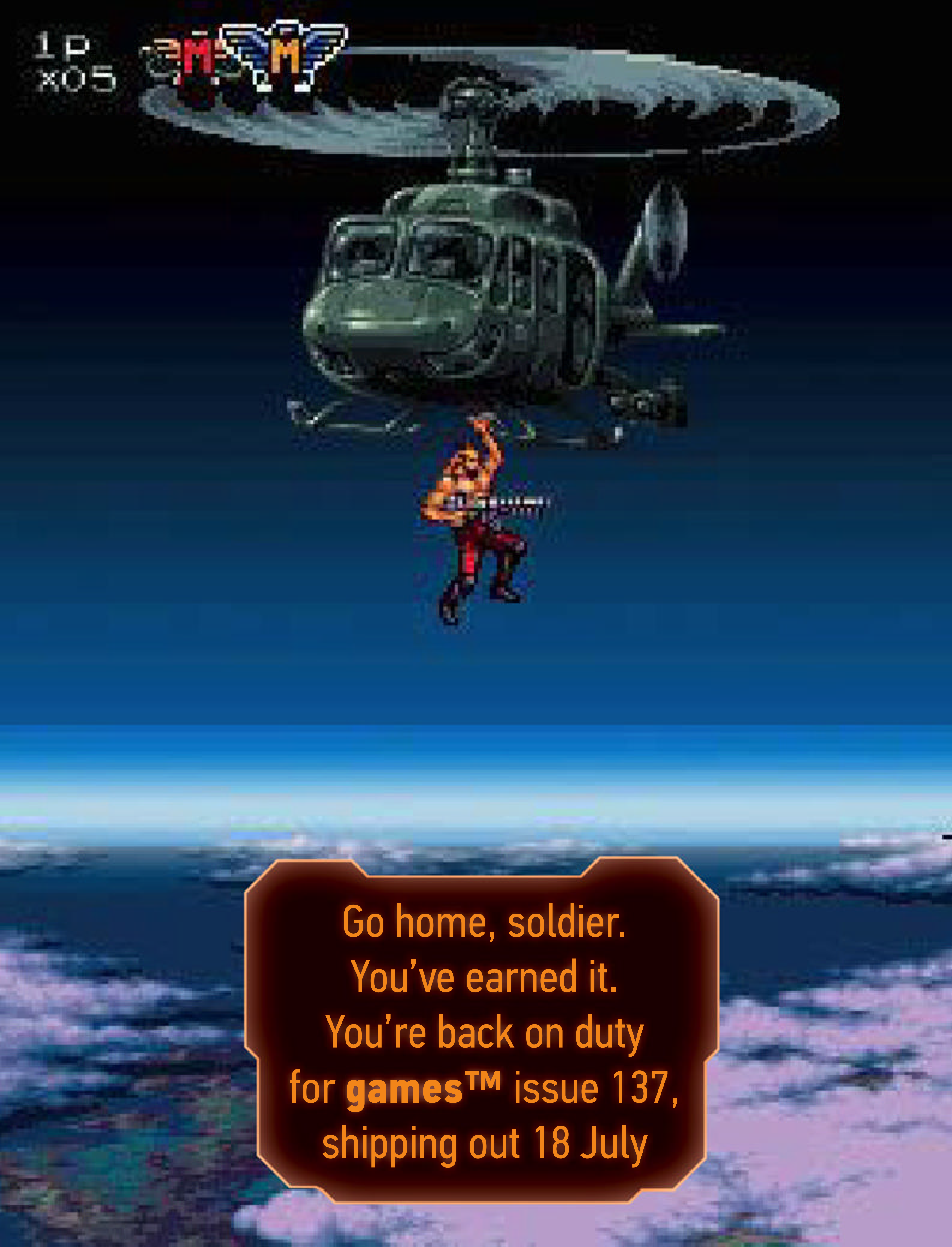
 ISSN 1478-5889





12,608
1 Jan - 31 Dec 2012




1P
x05
Go home, soldier.
You've earned it.
You're back on duty
for games™ issue 137,
shipping out 18 July